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I

Early in the autumn of 1938 three fishermen were in a tarred, flat-bottomed boat in the open sea, some dozen miles to the eastward of Gura Portiţei where the water sank to a depth of some 20—30 fathom. The oldest of them was over forty, and his name was Filoftei Romanov. He was a gloomy-looking man with a heavy, emphatic gaze; when he looked at you you felt as though a leaden curtain had been drawn before your face. He took you all in, sized you up and passed sentence. For which reason people fought rather shy of Filoftei Romanov; and yet they loved him because he had never harmed anyone, worked hard and honestly, and held his peace. He seldom spoke more than a few words at a time and even then it was only to preach the Holy Gospel; that was his way.

The second fisherman was Trofim Popov, who was not yet twenty-five and held his peace still more steadfastly than Filoftei. Trofim was of the gentle, submissive kind. If you said to him "do that," he did it; "go there," he went; "stay here," there he stayed. Filoftei was a tall, broad-shouldered man, with a big reddish beard and a heavy gaze before which you had to lower your

eyes. Trofim was also tall, though slim and beardless — with a blond stubble that had sprouted only since he had been at sea — and with very clear blue eyes that looked inquiringly at you like a child's. Filoftei spoke little, but Trofim not at all, except to say "yes" or "no" if ever you asked him anything — and continued in his silence.

The third fisherman in the boat was Adam Jora who at the time was 17 or 18, and as yet had no beard to show. He was even taller than the others — a head above them — and broad-shouldered too; and his grey eyes held a dark and turbulent look in anger — for by nature he was quickly roused — and he was obstinate too and rebellious.

Now, however, all three were silent. Adam and Trofim did not pull at the oars — they pushed them, so that the boat glided along slowly, very slowly, unhurriedly, stern foremost... The water lapped around its hull of tarred timber; the sun beat down through a thin film of vapour, and an unimaginable silence prevailed over the sea. The waves rolled noiselessly in gentle heavings. The water was smooth, translucent, oily. Far away in the distance, some four or five boats could be seen which were also from Danilofca; and there were certainly more of them beyond the skyline — all manned by high sea fishermen, scattered over that part of the sea.

Now while Adam and Trofim pushed at the oars, grasped tightly in their big red paws, and the boat slipped backward two or three more lengths, Filoftei squatted on its pointed poop that turned up like the toe-cap of a Turkish slipper, his knees drawn up to his ears, his hands wet, and, yard by yard, pulled in from the depths the thin, wet fishing-line. At regular

intervals, a bright steel hook hung from the line. And sometimes from that hook there hung a morsel of fish that was just as bright, though its brightness was of old silver and not of steel. At other times the bait was no longer on the hook, and then Filoftei stretched out his hand, took a bit of fish from a basket at the bottom of the boat, stuck it on the end of the hook and threw another length of line into the water. At the same time, with his left hand, he drew the next length of the long line from the water, and if the bait was missing from the hook, replaced it. Adam and Trofim pushed at the oars; the line and the hooks dripped with water, which trickled into the boat, while Filoftei, his arms wet to his elbows, drew out of the sea, length after length of the line, hook after hook, a length of line of a hundred yards, and a hundred hooks, one hundred and fifty hooks, two hundred, three hundred, four hundred... drew them out endlessly. The water lapped lazily under the keel of the boat, the oars creaked in the rowlocks, Adam and Trofim breathed hard, and Filoftei worked on silently. All wet down his spine, his shirt stuck to his back. Now and again he mumbled:

"More to the right... to the right..."

And then the younger men pushed harder at the left-hand oars against the unseen current which drew them away from the line that stretched along the sand at the bottom of the sea twenty-five fathom deep, under the grey-green waters with their big, slow roll.

"More to the right..."

Every hook that dropped into the water sounded like a stone pitched into it, and, like one, left a speck of foam on the water; you saw it dropping into the depths, its shine growing ever duller, until it disappeared into the green darkness. Another hook, and

yet another. All around the sea was deserted. The other boats had dropped away. Adam and Trofim pushed theirs onward, yard by yard.

"More to the right..."

A sea fishing-line is very long and seems still longer when not even a ray hangs from any of its hundreds of hooks. And early autumn afternoons are long, too, when the blazing sun is of a milky brilliance as it streams down through a thin veil of vapour. The sky was light blue, pale, immaterial, nearly grey. The translucent, oily water slid from the crest of the waves into the depth between them, noiselessly, without a crease, without a streak of foam, without a bubble. It lapped under the tarred hull of the boat — an incitement to idleness and sleep. Idleness and sleep... the dry rowlocks creaked... the men pushed at the oars, slowly, slowly, unhurriedly... and Filoftei mumbled:

"More to the right..."

Later when he was tired out, he would murmur only:

"Right..."

The wind had dropped long ago. Now and again there came, heaven knows from where, a light breeze that one was hardly aware of — a breath, barely enough to dull a mirror. That was all — and then nothing. After it the quiet in the atmosphere was unbroken. Far away, to the northward, tall, shadowy towers of cloud which set you wondering as to their colour — were they grey or of a reddish hue? — rose slowly from the horizon. Filoftei looked at them for a moment, for two maybe... and then proceeded to examine the line again. The oarsmen rowed on silently; they wiped the sweat from their brows with their shirt sleeves and pushed on. Trofim did not think of anything. Adam Jora, who was seventeen, thought of the girl that he met in the

evening at home under the willows, at a place where nobody could find them; and when he thought of her, he felt her in his arms and his heavy, burning head grew hotter; and a fearful power surged up within him. He would have liked to grow wings and fly over the sea, and suddenly his arms seemed strong enough to bear him through the air towards the shore, and across the salt-water lake that stretched as far as the eye could reach, and up to the clayey hills, to the clumps of willows where the girl waited for him in the evening shadows.

"More to the right!" Filoftei's weary voice would whisper.

Fly into the distance? But one had to work for one's winter bread; one had to work or the master of the boat and line would give one hell. Into the distance indeed! when there was such dire poverty about; when no fish had been hauled in though they had been working so hard and so long, and would soon be short of drinking water, too, for the little keg at the bottom of the boat was nearly empty...

Adam was restless. He had not exhausted himself like the other two; he was seventeen and there was within him more strength than even he suspected. He cleared his throat and said:

"Are we staying today as well, Uncle Filoftei?"

Filoftei did not reply. And, as if he had spoken to himself, Adam also answered himself:

"I think we'll be going ashore tomorrow..."

There was silence; the hooks gave a splashing sound as they dropped into the water and — remarkable thing — Trofim's voice was heard:

"What wind would take you home, you fool? Do you want to row all the way to Portița?"

"O wonder!" Adam answered merrily. "O wonder: Saint-John-of-the-padlocked-mouth has spoken. And why shouldn't I row? Of course I would!"

"To the right..." Filoftei Romanov mumbled in a stifled voice.

Adam was silent again and went on with his work. It was difficult to be light-hearted today. They had caught nothing, there was hardly any drinking water left, the owner of the boat and of the tackle would call them to account... and the coming winter would be harder than in other years because of this last week which had been sheer loss of time...

Adam sighed and swore between his teeth. What an idea of flying back to Danilofca and holding a girl in his arms at night! Wasn't the old woman at home waiting for him to bring her money, that she might buy flour and paraffin, and a pair of boots for him, for the old ones were so worn out that his toes stuck out of their gaping toe-caps... O, to hell with poverty and all it meant!

He rowed on, his eyes half closed. The lapping of the water almost sent one to sleep and the heat was unnatural for the time of the year. True, there was a breeze now and then, but even that was hot. You sweated and your heart throbbed painfully. The air was heavy and stifling and the sea grew ever quieter, as if it were drowsing, sinking into immobility.

Adam shifted his place on the seat. He felt restless. Again he cleared his voice and spoke:

"How Eftei will swear at us for leaving his line to rot in vain... God! how he'll swear! And next year..."

He was silent, waiting for an answer. But Filoftei said nothing and Trofim was as dumb as usual. Adam sighed and said:

"Unless you're a damned smart chap, you've no chance at all of making any money. If you're honest and work for a wage you can only live from hand to mouth... you can't put money by; you can't even think of putting anything by..."

He was silent again, for the effort to speak seemed suddenly too great. But this time Filoftei, who had his back to him and was doubled up in the stern, answered him:

"The Scriptures say: it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Yes," Adam mumbled disgustedly. "But in the meantime he's all right in his kingdom on earth... he eats and drinks well, buys land, sells fish and roe in the town and piles up his brass... while we, poor devils of fishermen, are left to king it over the seas."

Filoftei did not answer: he thought he had hooked a fish from the depths at last; however, the hook was empty. Filoftei stuck fish bait on it and dropped it into the water again. Then he looked at Adam over his shoulder and reproved him:

"You speak like a sinner and a fool... why should you judge others?"

"I don't judge them," Adam retorted. "I just say what I see. And aren't I right?"

"More to the right..." Filoftei mumbled.

Adam Jora laughed, shaking his head and pushing hard at the left oar. Then he sighed, he hardly knew why. It was hard to breathe, there seemed to be no air or there was something wrong with his lungs; however much air he drew in, there didn't seem to be enough of it, which was irritating — made one cantankerous and obstinate. How could one put up with this Filoftei?

He might be a man in the flower of his strength, a master fisherman, and a good and honest fellow; but how could one suffer him? Seventeen-year-old Adam, big, broad-shouldered, curly-headed Adam bent over the oars so sharply that his worn old shirt, all bleached by the sun, very nearly split across his back:

"You're a saintly man, Uncle Filoftei..." he murmured with a grin.

Filoftei raised his heavy look upon him:

"When I have knocked your head off," he said in his gruff voice, "you'll learn to honour your elders..."

Adam laughed, but he was annoyed. If he could have come to grips with Filoftei, who was as strong as a bull, he would have felt relieved. The air was so heavy and so dry that it held no coolness, however much of it you drew into your lungs; somehow it seemed to burn inside you. Even Filoftei seemed to have lost patience. Trofim alone was still silent and worked doggedly at the oars, his face all red and sweating; Filoftei grumbled angrily, all wet with sweat and sea water, as he stuck fish bait on a hook:

"You confounded son of a widow, you! Pity you had no father to flog you at the right time; if poor Pavel Jora had been alive, you wouldn't have grown into such a pagan! So bad and stubborn you are, I wonder you don't beat your mother!"

He threw the hook into the water angrily while Adam laughed a merry, fiendish laugh.

"Don't judge me, Uncle Filoftei, for that'll be a sin and then you won't go to Paradise. And who knows if you won't get your head punched first!"

His strong white teeth shone and his suddenly darkened eyes seemed nearly black. A little frightened,

Trofim remained silent. Filoftei closed up within himself and said:

"I have sinned... forgive me..."

He proceeded to examine the line again. He was so brawny and vigorous that it would not have occurred to anyone that he would be afraid of coming to grips with Adam... The young fellow knew this, and also knew that Filoftei had got himself under control out of Christian meekness; he could see he was angry, and was mastering himself with difficulty. 'I can't help it if he's a fool,' he thought. 'It would have been better if we'd fought it out and let off steam.' And, panting, he went on pushing at the oars. Then, wiping the sweat from his face with the back of his hand, he spoke suddenly in his usual tone:

"Listen, Uncle Filoftei, don't you think there's something wrong with the sea today?"

Filoftei mumbled in his deep voice, without looking up:

"And what would you have us do, clever one?"

Adam sat thinking for a while, then said:

"Leave the confounded line and go ashore..."

Filoftei shrugged his shoulders.

"If we did that, Eftei would sue us for having ruined his line; and further, in the three or four hours it would take us to row to land, the whole thing'll have blown over... If you'd been my son, I'd have struck you across the mouth when you answered me just now, to teach you not to be cleverer than your elders, but your mother hadn't the guts to lick you into shape!"

Adam answered heatedly:

"You should know, Uncle Filoftei, that if the old woman ordered me to jump into the fire I'd do it; and if she's angry with me I go on my knees to her and

stay on 'em for a week ! And let me tell you that you'll never get anywhere with me if you try your cudgel tricks !"

He went on rowing, frowning hard, his cheeks flushed. Then suddenly he burst out, his eyes aflame with anger:

"And don't you ever say a word against her again, you God-damned saintly old father confessor, you !"

Filoftei suddenly felt as if he would choke. In a wild burst of anger he was ready to throw the line overboard, leap from his perch, thrust Trofim aside and give Adam such a hiding as he'd never had before. Trofim seemed to have shrivelled up. And then Filoftei, suddenly deflated, and breathing hard, simply said in his gruff voice:

"You're a Godless devil and no mistake...whatever religion's been left in you shows only in your oaths !"

Adam sat frowning, his teeth clenched, and did not answer. Filoftei continued with some regret:

"And this is the last time you've come fishing with me. You're too wicked and blasphemous..."

Adam mumbled between his teeth:

"As if I could find no one else to go with..."

However, he felt dejected and from that moment he rowed in silence, tasting his sorrow to the full. Now and again he looked at Filoftei on the sly as if he wanted to say something. Once he even made as if to speak, but changed his mind and rowed on sullen and troubled. After that they toiled on without another word, except for Filoftei's low murmur:

"To the right..."

But for the sleepy lapping of the waves, a profound and eerie silence weighed upon them; time went by without their being aware of it and nothing moved

anywhere. The air grew drier and appeared to become less and less until, at long last, a prolonged and stifled sound, hardly audible — a mere tremor — was heard far away to the north-west. A clash of thunder had reached them from afar, but so faint that it seemed to be muffled by huge wads of cotton wool.

II

The waves were now gentle, rounded and swaying, still rising and falling without a sound; they were a greyish green with pale, troubled glints in them, as if they were not of the same water as the expanse of sea they rose from.

All along the horizon strange columns of vapour had risen like poplars or motionless figures faintly resembling the shapes of men — cotton-wool giants holding counsel on the horizon round the tiny boat lost on the immense sea; cotton-wool giants whose feet were rooted in greyish-blue mists. The three fishermen ceased their work; their hands on the oars, the younger men looked first at those strange visions that had risen from the sea, and then turned anxious eyes towards Filoftei. He had come to the end of the line, and now rose to his full height on the seat in the stern. He stood, his legs wide apart, so as not to fall with the pitch and roll of the boat, and, his arms akimbo, he too looked at the clouds — scanned the whole expanse of sky, and the remoter water with those eyes that made people feel shy. Here, however, nothing feared his heavy look. The clouds gathered slowly, as over a seething cauldron, above a circle of ever more quiet water. Filoftei again surveyed the scene around him, then raised his beard

and examined the sky once more: it was pale blue, nearly white. Filoftei looked about him once more. Was there no little rift left whence light and fresh air could come? No. Everything merged into a greyish, pinky mist which seemed to be lighted from within by a smouldering fire burning behind the thick vapour.

No, there was no hope anywhere of the weather clearing. Filoftei's face darkened; he looked down on the surrounding water, on the gentle waves that swung around the boat and then he saw the bird. And the younger men who had kept silent in their anxiety and followed each of his moves, saw it too. It was a small, dark bird, with long, narrow wings. It skimmed over the water very close to them, following the rise and fall of the rounded waves, and seemed to sink more and more in the silence of the sea. Sometimes the bird flew so low that it was lost sight of for a time between two billows, then it appeared again, an arrow flashing over the deadly gloss of the depths, with no movement of its black, narrow outspread wings. Filoftei Romanov watched it as it darted over the water gliding down on the waves and gave it an unfriendly smile. He mumbled:

"So, you've come..."

He stepped down from his seat, and sitting with his legs crossed under him, Turkish fashion, began unwinding a coil of rope. Without glancing at the other two men, he spoke quietly:

"Fasten everything in the boat..."

They too had seen the clouds; they were aware of the deadly calm of the sea, of their own blood throbbing heavily in their head and their veins, and had seen the stormy petrel. They had understood. They knew. They set to work feverishly, tying fast the fishing-tackle, the keg of drinking water, the oars, everything; they

tied every piece of timber inside the boat to the inner belt linking the ribs. With their thick fingers, calloused by rowing, they made clever, complicated knots. They knelt in the boat and worked quickly, their shirts damp with sweat. Drops of salty sweat were dripping from their brows and running into the corners of their mouths. They worked feverishly until Adam Jora suddenly felt it had become still more difficult to breathe, and stopped. His heart was giving great hammer blows, then eased a little; and the red, knotty fingers of the young fellow continued to make intricate knots. Adam glanced furtively at Trofim, who had not spoken a word and had done nothing to show anything unusual was happening except that he had made a bad knot, a three-looped knot of which only two loops were satisfactory, and which had now to be undone. He was hard at work on it and his hands shook. Adam chuckled, saying to himself: 'Trofim's scared all right... though doesn't my heart beat hard too?' and he went on working feverishly.

Now and again he looked up at the clouds and the sea. The water had become silvery — with a metallic gloss on it. The light could not pierce its depths. Indeed, there was little light, and what there was of it was of a dull, strange eerie hue as during an eclipse. The clouds rose over the horizon to the northward, and ever higher towards the zenith until a whitish mountain of vapour was banked up in that part of the sky. It had rounded crests which dropped away into precipices while on their edges were entire fortresses, churches, fantastic animals and white poplars; and beneath, close to where the water met the sky, there was a gathering mist. Adam Jora watched wide-eyed the changing clouds and their threatening height. Then he said anxiously:

"Uncle Filoftei....this will be more terrible than the one in the spring!"

"If it be God's will," Filoftei answered in a tone of finality. Then: "Well, have you done?"

He rose to his feet.

The waves swayed to and fro ever so gently. Standing, Filoftei felt a faint, soft breath of wind, which did not come from the mountain of clouds, but from the south. Filoftei licked his finger and held it up to make sure that the breath of wind came from that quarter — and when he was sure of it his face darkened still more. He again asked the young men:

"Well, have you done?"

"I have," Adam answered.

Bent on his knees, Trofim was finishing a last knot.

"Not yet ready, Trofim?"

"Just this one and I'm ready," Trofim replied in a stifled voice.

Filoftei took in at one glance the boards at the bottom of the boat, the mast, the main yard and he nodded. There was enough timber. He got hold of his axe and cut the mast into four and the yard, which was shorter, into three. The young men stood waiting, their arms hanging down their sides. Filoftei said:

"Bring them all here."

They did so: boards, pieces of the mast and timber of every kind. Three times he wound them round tightly with the anchor rope — a thin though strong piece of cord. Then he tied the anchor with fast knots and threw it into the sea. He made the sign of the cross. Trofim also crossed himself, while Adam quickly made a small cross as he watched the anchor sink. There were a few eddies in the water and the rope gradually disappeared, sliding into the depth like a white serpent. After

the anchor, Filoftei let down more lenghts of the rope; yard by yard: twenty, forty, sixty, seventy yards of it...Then, tied to the same rope, he threw in the timber and again a yard of rope, two, three, ten, twenty yards... Then he tied the end of the rope to an iron hook in the stern of the boat. There was nothing left in the boat now. Bound tightly, the timber was floating quietly a few yards away. The water was grey, and, in the distance, of a deadly white, with leaden shadows. The three fishermen sat down on their seats and Filoftei gave a deep, weary sigh:

"Well...why not eat something?"

"We're not hungry," Adam answered.

"A little water then," Filoftei said.

The young fellows held their peace. Trofim went and drew a few mouthfuls of water out of the keg, through an old rubber tube. Adam, too, longed for a drink, but would have had difficulty in swallowing it. He sat down at his place, waiting. Trofim took some bread and dry sausage and began to munch slowly. He never once looked around him. Filoftei, his beard bobbing up and down, was whispering something they could not hear. Adam looked at him for a few moments, waiting. Finally, Filoftei finished his prayers and made the sign of the cross. Adam spoke mockingly:

"Uncle Filoftei, if we get safely through this, I'll tell them to make you a metropolitan."

Nobody answered. Filoftei, his eyes closed, his beard resting on his breast, his hands clenched, held his peace. Trofim munched on steadily, his jaws working hard.

A bluish shadow had spread all around them. The mass of clouds, with its dizzy height, was nearly upon them. Trofim looked up at it, his head bent back,

then swallowed a morsel of bread with difficulty, looking thoughtfully at the piece he still held in his hand and finally decided to put it away.

Adam stared at the timber floating on the water. It had drifted away, the rope that held it spreading over the surface. 'How quickly the current takes one!' the young man thought. 'It's scurrying southward, poor thing, but it'll be caught up with... We're not running away. We're riding at anchor and waiting... No doubt there is nothing else to be done. That's how it was last spring too... Filoftei's a master fisherman, and he knows...A decent man; and brave too, poor chap...Oh, what a brute I am! — get riled so easily... but he's a fool too; couldn't he see that none of us could breathe? I'd rather he'd have knocked me about and have done with it... And now, God's servant though he is, he lets his temper get the better of him, and one couldn't make it up with him even though you dragged him to it with four strong oxen...However, that's his affair! I may have been in the wrong, but he was in the wrong too. And that's the end of it...'

And yet things could not remain as they were. He would have to speak to Filoftei. 'Not now though, later...yes, a bit later...'

As he was considering things and telling himself: 'Later, later, but certainly today — only just a little later,' the wind rose.

First a coolness spread over the sea. The oppressive sultriness lifted suddenly; the air became clear, light and fresh. But only for the fraction of a moment, until the storm loosed itself upon them. For the storm had come.

A compact violet-coloured darkness had formed at the base of the cloud-mountain banked up over

them and which now overshadowed the whole sea. In the middle of the sky, to the north, the darkness was the most intense. And that core of darkness extended and drew nearer. It had risen over the horizon, swallowed it, and covered the remotest stretches of the sea. And the blue-black rampart was approaching at a tremendous pace. The waters that touched that rampart trembled and sparkled like quicksilver; but their sheen gradually vanished, was swallowed up, covered by the lower fringes of the curtain of darkness, though in the midst of that black vapour there were short, dazzling flashes and from that rampart of storm came a low deep rumble like the roar of many cannons, growing louder as it came nearer, finally becoming absolutely terrifying. Gusts of wind swept over the sea in the van of the storm, dulling the gloss of the water as if someone had thrown some sand on a mirror. A rustle as of a wind-swept forest, the sharp whistle of the north wind, the crashes of thunder and the sudden flashes of lightning were drawing ever nearer: a puzzling, unconquerable hostility, an immense wrath which engulfed the sky and the sea.

With the grey, patched canvas which they used as a sail when the wind was favourable, Filoftei Romanov covered the stern of the boat and made it fast. The water about them had become of a metallic whiteness with glints of light on it; but the sky above them looked as if night had already fallen. They looked at each other and saw faces that seemed to be of a violet-white hue, with glassy eyes. Standing at the end of the boat, Filoftei again tried the knot of the anchor rope. The rampart of the storm was now directly above them; the flashes of lightning lit up the whole sea, and then the thunder came which seemed to shatter their brains.

Suddenly the water around the boat grew dark and rough and the three fishermen felt a cold, cutting wind as the sea was caught in a grey, indistinct whirl. With such a thunderous noise did the storm strike them that they felt as if the very sky had fallen upon their heads. Suddenly the boat was shaken to its last bit of timber and tugged frantically at the rope; the timber that made it fast, bobbed out of the water and fell back again, splashing foam around it. Filoftei was thrown on his back; Adam took hold of him and held him fast. The three of them huddled at the bottom of the boat, under the outspread canvas, shielding their heads with their arms. At that moment hail fell, striking against the canvas and the bottom of the boat with a resounding rattle. The boat struggled desperately and at every plunge Adam went in fear of biting his tongue. Clenching his teeth he tried to shield his head with his elbows. He was cold; the icy bullets rattled against the tarred timber and collected at the bottom of the boat, whence Filoftei, soaked to the skin, with water trickling down his neck and beard, shovelled it out with a baler. When the hail ceased, it began to rain — a cold, heavy rain. There were two balers in the boat — they looked like wooden sabots with handles — and with them — Adam with one, Filoftei with the other — they baled out the water. Blinded by the flashes of lightning, deafened by the unceasing roar of the thunder, wet through, Adam yet managed to reach Filoftei's ear:

"Such storms quickly blow over. And after the rain, the sea calms down!"

Filoftei looked over the side of the boat which now heaved up so that nothing could be seen except the grey rain and the greyer clouds, now dived under the crest of a violet wave. As far as the eye could reach the

sea was streaked with white crests. And just when Filoftei looked over the side of the boat, the rain subsided. The wall of water flecked with light could be seen receding into the distance with a thunderous rumble. Behind it the fearful whistle of the wind persisted, and clouds like those of coal smoke sailed so low over the water that it seemed one might touch them with one's hand. Black, white-crested billows rose and fell. Wiping the water from his face, Filoftei carefully examined the rope which was struggling like a serpent held fast by its tail, and, as it sank and rose to spread upon the water like a whip, throwing up foam and streaming with water, he flung his arm round Adam's shoulders and shouted into his ear — for in that whistling wind there was no other way to make himself heard:

"This is not like other storms!"

Adam's eyes grew wide. He did not understand. Filoftei thrust his beard against his ear again:

"Worse than others... You've never seen one like it, nor has Trofim! You'll see..."

He crouched into the boat again to see whether he couldn't find a dry shirt or coat; while Adam returned to his baling, though not before having cast another glance at the alien sea, all black with unreasonable hostility. While he worked, the roll of the boat sent him plunging to one side and the other, bruising his ribs and elbows. Once he struck the ribs of the boat — a painful impact. Another time he knocked his head against Filoftei's, but Filoftei said nothing. Glancing at Trofim he saw him with eyes half closed, pale and huddled up. And he noted, too, that his head swayed strangely with the roll of the boat:

"What's the matter with him?" he asked in alarm.

"He's sick," Filoftei answered quietly and went on with his work.

"Aha... that's the bread and the sausage," Adam murmured; but he was more master of himself now and continued with his baling, hoping to warm himself up, for he was shaking with cold.

✦

They slipped over a rounded hill of water — higher and higher. How much longer? To what heights? A respite when you are forced to hold your breath; a sudden collapse over a glossy, gentle slope, a collapse... a sudden impact: the rope has done its duty, though how long will it endure? The boat dips its bows into the water and sends off curtains of foam on either side; and then another wave and everything goes up again and the sea goes down, seething and foaming while you hold your breath, knowing that the crucial moment is coming. Again you are pitched into a boiling cauldron: the sea around you rises high and threateningly and the anchor rope never ceases its sharp tugs. The pain and torture of it all! When the boat goes up and your inside goes down; when your stomach is an empty void, and you retch and retch again; when the boat goes down and your inside rises into your mouth; when that sickness has got you anew, when your heart contracts every time a wave strikes the boat, every time the cable tugs at it; how long will the rope last — how long? For then 'twill be only a matter of moments before the end... It is night, with the wind drawing curtains of cloud over the stars that appear and vanish. The storm whistles shrilly in your ears and hair, and whips the canvas that is stretched over the end of the boat and trembles and

cracks. A difficult time. In the inky darkness the white foam only makes faint patches of light; you are hungry but cannot eat. You are thirsty and one mouthful of water from the little keg is more than enough. Again and again Filoftei is at the prow, checking the knots of the anchor rope; and Trofim lies down at the bottom of the boat. He has vomited his inside out — his very gall; there is nothing more he can vomit now and so he lies there — helpless. You can't blame him: the sturdiest of men are as little children, absolutely helpless, under such circumstances — no good for anything. It is dark and cold and a cutting wind is blowing; drops of foam have been whirled about for some time; the wind has dried you and now the wind drenches you again. And the boat is going up ever higher... and crashing down again, spraying foam about and tugging at the cable so that you might have bitten your tongue a thousand times an hour. You're too bewildered and deafened by the noise to think. The sea rumbles, making a noise like the unloading of stone on a stone-paved road from a million carts. You're deaf and dizzy, sick, tired and cold; but the worst is yet to come. You feel sleepy; your head drops on your chest; then strikes against the side of the boat as you nod. You are hurt and swear fearfully but nobody hears you in the din raised by the storm; and again your lids droop and your mind grows dull; you fall, strike against the ribs of the boat while other ribs stick into your hip and your own ribs; you huddle up like a wet dog, you curl yourself up, your head resting on your arms, trying to sleep; but the boat heaves and falls, rising to one side and then to the other and all your weight goes into your head; then you roll on your back to be turned face down again; and anger surges up within you making you

feel like tearing someone to pieces although you are benumbed and helpless.

Suddenly, o wonder, o joy! there's a moment's calm and you no longer feel that tug when a wave comes up; a moment that seems like eternity, when you are tired and ready to fall asleep. The boat now seems to rise along a circular course, dipping into the sea, rising, rolling you; the boat is a cradle that rocks you gently to sleep; you relax, feel happy, relieved, and allow yourself to rest. But it lasts only for a moment — the time it takes Filoftei to give a start, to lunge forward and kick you in the ribs as he roars in his thick voice hoarse with fear:

"Adam! To the oars! The rope has broken!"

Adam was up in a moment — the shortest moment in his life. Immediately alive to everything, weariness, numbness, and sleep all gone, gone with the wind, he pulled himself together, jumped onto the seat, and grabbed the oars from the bottom of the boat, dipped them, and pulled with all his might. One of the oars flew into the air and Adam very nearly fell to the bottom of the boat. The second time, both oars dipped too far into the seething foam and the young fellow pulled at them as if he was pulling a loaded cart with each hand. Filoftei had slipped under him and fixed up the second pair of oars; and now he too was pulling desperately — neck craned forward. The boat had to be steered so that its prow should meet each oncoming wave. The first moment the cable had broken, the boat, rising to one side, had ridden on a threatening wave obliquely; a second wave would have cut across it and a third overturned it. Now, however, no such thing would happen: Adam and Filoftei rowed fit to disjoint their arms at the shoulders pulling harder at the left-hand oar when the boat swung to the left,

and when it swung to the right striving their utmost to make good use of the right-hand oars. Filoftei kicked Trofim's head with his bare foot:

"Trofim, put in the oars and go to it !"

Trofim was a little black heap in the boat, falling to one side and the other with the sway of the boat. He groaned something unintelligible.

"Trofim !"

There was no answer, so Filoftei fell silent and from that moment he and Adam toiled alone, their backs against the wrathful night wind. They rose to the crest of a wave and saw the black sky, dotted with blue, starry patches, and the dark, heaving sea faintly streaked with white foam, and across the sea, as far as the eye could reach, the same streaks of white foam. And these crests of the waves sparkled in the inky darkness with a secret light of their own. Behind them — for once Adam looked back over his shoulder — behind them roared the savage wind, risen from the darkness, from the black cave of the sky in the north-east. It whistled and shrieked, plucking at the white crests of the waves and driving them horizontally over the sea. Adam's and Filoftei's backs were soaked by the cold gushes of water that flew over the seas. The waves rose high, ever higher, sparkling, sleek and black; then they would bend, furl and roll over with a deafening rushing sound, full of a blind nonsensical anger. The two men strove frantically at their oars and the pointed, curved prow of the boat would rise on the wave towards the crest, cut through the roll of foam, and the boat would be still for a moment,both prow and poop in the air, its mid-hull swallowed in the whirling whiteness, then slither down between two curtains of foam. And again it would rise over a wave and again they had. to pull at the oars with all their strength. Around them

was a continuous rumble, a mad uproar; the wind gave piercing shrieks and wound over them like a whip; the waves furled and unfurled, howling and seething, with the boat sometimes dipping as if into a boiling cauldron, and rising again to perch perilously on the peak of a slippery mountain of water. It went up and down ceaselessly, lurching now to one side, now to the other, curtains of foam rushing in, splashing over the side, soaking Trofim and the other two. Suddenly Adam felt the water lapping against his ankles, saw it shining darkly at the bottom of the boat. And at that moment Filoftei roared in an unrecognizable voice:

"Trofim ! bale out !"

Looking over Filoftei's shoulders Adam saw Trofim — an indistinct form — pulling himself together with unwieldy movements and starting to bale the water out of the boat. Now and again he would lean against the side of the boat as if to vomit. But it was too dark to see anything distinctly. Adam closed his eyes, feeling sleep overcome him again. Pull, Adam, or we're done for! The wind tugs at the oars as you raise them out of the water — it won't let you row, goes against you. Push them against the wind ! One side of the boat is two yards out of the water, the other two spans; on one side the whole oar is engulfed, on the other the oar meets nothing but air. Row on, Adam, in the water and in the air, or we perish. The wave raises you so that all your entrails contract, then it sucks you into the depths so that your heart is in your mouth. It strikes against you on one side so that your head is nearly jerked from your shoulders; then throws you the opposite way, very nearly pitching you out of the boat. The wind forces you down, as if it had hands, then throws bucketfuls of fine spray into the back of your neck to drench you through. And this water remains

in the boat, lapping quietly at your feet. Bale out Trofim, you bloody fool, or the boat'll be swamped!

It is night; it has been night for a long time now and it will be for a long time to come.

Through a rift in the black clouds, the axle of Charles' Wain can be seen. But the stars are small and sparkle but faintly; had it been daylight, the sky in that direction would be grey, not blue; and the clouds would be as black as now, the wind's whistle would be as shrill, the rush and rumble of the waves would be the same — as if all the forests, all the boulders of the world were rolling down into a bottomless precipice.

And another wretched thing — the oars in your hands are wet and you can't get a proper hold on them. They twist in your grasp and you must fight it out with them. And you don't see anything. Behind you, you hear the wave howling and rising, and you feel it taking you up with it. You see yourself being raised up and have a glimpse of white-foam bubbles all around and as far as the darkness on the horizon, then you are pitched between the waves to the bottom of the sea whence the horizon seems about ten yards in front and some four or five yards above you — a line with a rounded crest like a horse's mane, with a crest that furls up and is hurled against you with a howl.

"Adam," Filoftei roared, turning his head to one side and leaning far back as he pulled at the oars. "Adam!" Then, taking his oars out of the water and leaning forward, he rested upon them.

Doing as Filoftei had done, Adam asked:

"What's the matter?"

Filoftei leaned back again:

"Take it easy! We don't know how long it'll last!"

His words came with difficulty, for the wind drove them back, and made them indistinct and changed them.

"Right, Uncle Filoftei, I'll take it easy."

"Only keep the prow on top of the wave!" Filoftei roared again.

'Right,' Adam Jora thought, 'I'll do my best. But how long will it be night? And what time can it be now? Twelve? One?' What with the wind, and the roar of the sea, and the dizziness in his head he could no longer think clearly. Hoop... up you go... to stay for an instant...and then to fall heavily to one side in the splashing foam. And again you go up and again you fall, endlessly, jerked this way and that between the sky and the depths.

'God Almighty,' Filoftei thought, 'Lord, God Sabaoth, God of Wrath, your punishment is just; but be merciful! Take pity on your sinful servant and on these children!' 'God damn the sea and all the fish in it,' thought Adam. 'It's all very well in its way but if I'm drowned that'll be the end of the old woman; she'll have to go begging and that would just about break her heart... No! You can't drown me, you cursed, confounded sea! I'll teach you! I'll tear you to bits with my teeth! Ha, ha! Do you think you'll get away with it? Take that! Here's one oar right into your belly! And here's another!'

But Trofim never thought of anything. Now and then he gripped the side of the boat with his hands, rested his elbows on it and retched, but he could no longer vomit for there was nothing more he could vomit. Not even gall. When the sickness had passed a little, he took hold of the baler and went on with his baling. As a fresh feeling of sickness came over him, he groaned:

"Mother... oh, mother!..."

Mother! what rot! All around the sea howled and fretted and the wind spat cold salt spray at them, and roared at them in savage, unreasonable hatred. What have I done to you, wind? What have you against me, sea? You've done nothing to us, we've nothing against you; but tomorrow morning you'll be stretched out on the sands together with the other two; you'll be cold and stiff and there'll be brown weeds in your mouth and in your hair, and sand in your open eyes. Why? We give no answers. We don't know why, and neither do you. It's the law. What law? Yours and ours. Change it if you can. Can you change it?

Trofim was too sick to think of all this and too scared; and even had he been all right and in all his senses, he was slow-witted and could not have answered these questions, although there is an answer to them.

III

The iron signboards of the Constantzà shops creaked for three days and nights; for three days and nights the roofs in the town shook. For three days and nights the villages were shrouded in clouds of dust which the cold wind drove over the steppe. For three days and nights the wives of the Danilofca fishermen waited for the return of their men or at least for news of them.

The next day the sky was darker. Black clouds like coal smoke sped over the waters and disintegrated, scattering greyish wisps on their way, wisps which the wind collected and drove towards other wisps to form another cloud which it unfurled again and let loose over the billows. And clouds of flying foam flew over the water, and ebony birds that shrieked as they winged over the

foaming crests. Occasionally the sleek back of a dolphin emerged; but for many long hours, for days and nights, the sea was tempestuous and deserted. Trofim had recovered somewhat and though still weak had taken a hand at rowing. Filoftei had roared:

"Now, Adam, give over a bit!"

But Adam seemed not to have heard, and went on rowing.

"Adam!"

Then Adam had leaned forward and shouted:

"Take a rest yourself, I'm younger!"

And Filoftei had obeyed. It was the first time such a thing had happened: he being in the boat with two young fellows and doing as one of them had told him! It was not as it should be. But he was exhausted. Without a word, he had crouched in the boat and had taken on the baling to relieve Trofim. A few hours later, he had again taken to the oars and Adam then took his turn at resting. That day they ate nothing, only drank the water still left in the keg. In the evening there was no more water. They rowed without intermission all night. At dawn their faces were grey, and they looked worn and shrivelled, with their eyes deep in their sockets and bright as if with fever. The dawn was a miserable, scanty dawn; and in that early morning light, the grey sea with its immense white crests roared omnipotent. And it was then they sighted a ship in the distance. Smoke was coming up from her funnel and ran ahead of her along the sea while she rode the waves ponderously, raising her prow above the water, dipping and rising again... Two hours passed by; Trofim had tried to signal to her, but fearful of being washed overboard, he sat down again. He felt too tired to exert himself over much. All three were rowing now: Trofim behind Adam, Adam

behind Filoftei. Towards midday Trofim's mind began to wander. The wind carried his words to Adam's ear. But giddy and dazed by the ceaseless plunging of the boat, Adam did not realize at first that Trofim was talking to him:

"Adam...hi, Adam...how lovely it is at Danilofca... in the spring when the hill grows green and we go to Gura Portiței. When the fish fight their way to the sea... Do you remember?"

So he went on, speaking and halting. Some of his words were taken by the wind and Adam could not hear them. But what he heard was as in a dream — a dream in which he himself figured, discontented and obstinate, as was his temper and his habit. Lovely did you say? Of course, it was lovely, but what good was that? It was Eftei and Old Sava that did business with the umber.

"...In summer we make love to the girls under the willows and the mosquitoes don't half get at us... People make reed fires in their courtyards...and we jump those fires... Have *you* ever jumped them, Adam?"

"Hang it, never! *You* jumped like the fool you are, that Sava and Danilov's boys should laugh at you and give you a coin."

Trofim did not hear him.

"...And in the autumn, when wine is made, we roll our trousers up to our knees and tread out the grapes in the press... and then we drink must and sleep in the fields under a hayrick..."

"... Yes, and Danilov pays you twenty lei for the day's work — what you'd give to a beggar! What can you do with a sum like that?" Adam roared over his shoulder in his anger. He was big and broad-shouldered

and younger than Trofim, who was a dull sort and older; Adam shouted at him as he would to a child. Trofim's pull at the oars grew weaker. There was no strength left in him. He smiled foolishly, looking yellow and exhausted.

"... And in the winter, when the weddings begin, and there's snow about! You pull on your best boots and go to the wedding of one of your relations — where you find the whole family in the warm rooms; and, what a bean-feast you have! You eat and drink and dance... How good it is, pals, how good..."

Adam felt a knot in his throat. He wanted to weep but also to wrench the oar from the row locks and land Trofim one on the head and split open his stupid pate. He roared hoarsely over his shoulder:

"Hold your trap! Hold your trap and don't speak to me about weddings! At weddings we are put at the far end of the table! And it's Sava and Eftei's sons and the sons of the others, the rich fellows, who dance with the girls and not the likes of us. And it is they and not the likes of us that drink the autumn wine at Christmas. What are you so pleased about, you fool? Tell me that!"

He was choking with anger and couldn't go on. Trofim jabbered on, his blue, childish eyes looking into the distance, and smiling happily. Adam felt he must weep or strike him on his head with the oar. He did neither, but his anger abated now. He went on rowing obstinately, although his arms were numb and his shoulders and the joints of his hands ached horribly; it was as if his arms, ribs, shoulders, palms, fingers, everything would become disjointed and fall to pieces. But he continued doggedly, clenching his teeth and swearing and blaspheming within himself, striking the water with his oars in hatred.

And the wind whistled over them, not a bit tamed; the sea rushed towards them, turning its wrath into seething foam, so that as far as the horizon there was nothing but churning water, clouds torn by the wind, storm, and air laden with cold, salty spray. When would it end? Would they see its end? If it would only calm for a time that they might rest a brief spell and pull less frantically at the oars — and perhaps only one or maybe two of them should pull. For here was Trofim ready to collapse and Uncle Filoftei, who was as strong as a bull, weakening. Adam could see his red, sunburnt neck with its rough skin overgrown with hair and two wrinkles making deep furrows across it. Now Filoftei's neck seemed to have grown thinner and to have become the colour of earth; the bull had grown weak; poor Uncle Filoftei had grown weak . . . Adam was moved by pity. He rowed his hardest with aching arms. All giddy with sleeplessness, he slipped down into space, rose into the air, fell to one side, his oars striking unwittingly the surface of the water; his back was wet and frozen, and he felt like crying in pity for Filoftei Romanov, especially when Filoftei turned his head over his shoulder and looked at him as if to say: 'I'm done for. I'm sorry, Adam, my lad, but I can't go on — I'm done for.' Filoftei's leaden eyes were now pure and clear; his nose had grown thinner, his face was pale, livid. Adam swallowed his tears; utter despair and fury possessed him. He spoke aloud wondering how he looked as he spoke:

"Uncle Filoftei! When we return to Danilofca, you'll forget your anger against me, won't you, and take me to sea with you again?"

Filoftei just went on rowing, his back turned towards him and his head sinking on his breast. Adam roared:

"Uncle Filoftei! Did you hear?"

Filoftei nodded and looked at him over his shoulder, smiling and nodding: Yes, he would take him out to sea again. And his smile was such that the young fellow began to curse again — the wind, the storm and the sea, and the fishermen's trade, and also Eftei, the owner of the boat and of the tackle; to curse poverty and life; and the sky and the earth. His face was white and his teeth were bared in fury. Filoftei stopped rowing. Huddled up at the bottom of the boat which threw him now against one side, now against the other, he had abandoned the oars and was busy with some ropes. He had made fast the baler; now he unshipped the oars and fixed them fast to the board across the ribs of the boat. But hearing Adam shouting and cursing, he became confused and said:

"If God lets us be drowned I believe it'll be on account of your lack of faith! But — I know what a sinner I am myself and that I have no right to judge others. My sins are enough to punish us all . . ."

"You lie!" Adam answered. "You lie! Why should God drown us? I'm young. I want to live, to have a wife and kids. If I drown, the old woman'll starve! That isn't my sin. And what have I done? As for you, you're righteous. You don't lie, steal or drink; you're always praying, and you have a wife and children! Why should He drown us? What've we done to Him? Who've we wronged? It isn't right! It isn't right!"

Filoftei was now tying long ropes to the board across the ribs of the boat and the end of one of these ropes he tied around his waist. As he did so, in his fatigue, he snapped at Adam:

"Do you dare judge God? Can you know what is right? And think to pass sentence on the storm?"

Adam was silent, clutching tightly at the oars so that his knuckles showed white. His teeth were clenched,

everything within him was fierce obstinacy. He had fallen silent because it was only now that he realized what Filoftei was doing: he was going through the last rite of a fisherman at sea. Having tied the rope around himself he slipped with unwieldy movements under the seat and began securing Trofim, allowing him enough rope to swim free of the boat if it overturned. With drooping head and eyes half closed, Trofim allowed himself to be tied, without uttering a word. He was rowing unconsciously, weakly, often without even dipping his oars into the water, or simply splashing the others. Now that only Adam was rowing, the waves dealt more roughly with the boat than ever, and it rocked frightfully. When Filoftei got back to his place, Adam shouted:

"And a length for me too!"

So Filoftei slipped a rope round his waist also, though Adam never for a moment slackened his work at the oars. Suddenly it seemed to him that Filoftei was impeding him in his work and he roared:

"Here, give me room! Get out of my way!"

But Filoftei was obstinate. What did he want with him? Finally Adam understood and let him be. Filoftei pressed the young man to him, kissed him on both his cheeks getting his wet beard into his ears, and made the sign of the cross over his forehead.

Then he knelt at the bottom of the boat, his knees wide apart so as to keep his balance, and began to pray aloud:

"Our Father which art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name, Thy Kingdom come..."

"He'll be here directly!" Adam said. "A little patience, He'll be here directly!"

"...Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven."

"...On earth as it is on the seas!" Adam said with a savage laugh.

"... As it is on the seas," Filoftei repeated unconsciously and continued his prayer.

Adam suddenly felt his arms grow weary and limp; what was the good of rowing any more? He boated the oars and began to secure them with an indifference which astonished him, as one is astonished by something one does in a dream. A greenish-grey wave rolled over them, unfurled its crest and the boat ascended obliquely to the top of it, then slid and stopped transversally in a trough of sleek, dark water, tossing and eddying. The second wave caught the boat sideways, raised it several yards to just beneath its crest and then, when the crest rolled over, overturned it, engulfing it in white, seething foam. As the wave dashed on, the black, wet, shiny hull of the overturned boat slid down on it. Close to it the heads of the three fishermen emerged from the boiling water; then another wave rolled in and swung over the boat again, swallowing it up. When it appeared anew, a rope had become wound around it and a man was gripping the boat; the second could not be seen; the third was swimming. Another wave and the boat was swung over once more. When the wave had rolled by, a man lay on the overturned boat; he lay full length on the boat, without a movement. The back of the second man floated above the surface, his head, arms and legs deep in the water. The third went on swimming.

IV

As the fatal wave lifted Adam from the boat and carried him in its whirl of cold air and water, the lad was at first dazed, but he opened his mouth wide and managed to draw a deep breath into his lungs, before

he was again carried under the water. Suddenly he felt a tug at his waist and, with the blood throbbing in his temples and his chest ready to burst, he came up to the surface again, splashing wildly. He hardly had the time to inhale before the crushing roll of another crest fell upon his head. It turned him over like a doll, like a plaything; entangled him in the rope; brought his head in sharp contact with the boat. In the whirling sheets of water that flowed over one another, he had twice felt the passing touch of a human body. Whose was it? Filoftei's or Trofim's, or were there two of them? He could not know, but he took care not to get in their way with his rope which tugged at his waist with every movement of the boat. Each time he came up, he drank in the air quickly before the foaming crest of a new wave swallowed him up again in its effervescence. Dizzy and breathless, for he was submerged for long, he might have drowned a thousand times; but there was strength in him still and he went on with his mad struggle not knowing how he did it. Once he became entangled in the rope that tied the other two and that very nearly kept him under for good. On one side, the boat tugged at him, on the other a heavy body. Struggling desperately, Adam felt a shudder of dread pass through him: had one of them gone already? And who was it? All this while, a weight on his chest, his ears tingling, he struggled to release himself. The greyish light of day hardly penetrated the water. Beneath the surface, with eyes wide open, Adam could see through the silvery churning water above him the black, oblong shape of the boat, the whitish grey serpent-like ropes and a dark, floating body. When he had almost given up the struggle and was ready to open his mouth and draw the deadly water into his chest, he finally succeeded in reaching

the surface and the air. And there, beside him floated the motionless man of whom he had only seen the back: it was Trofim sure enough. Adam did not see his face. That moment another wave took him, hurled him against the boat, wound the rope around it and Adam found himself bound to the tarred timber, his hair hanging downwards, a span's distance from the water. Beside him and exactly in the same position, was Filoftei, his head hanging down, his beard pointing skywards. Through his open mouth his teeth could be seen while his eyes stared fixedly at the grey sky where clouds, black as coal smoke, chased each other. In a few seconds Adam saw it all and then he was under the water again, head down, tied close to the boat. He struggled frantically, desperately to unwind the rope from the boat and when he finally succeeded, he lay on his stomach on the tarred upturned boat near Filoftei who was stretched on his back, tied and drowned. Just time for another breath and the waves again swung the boat over and Adam found himself swimming some ten yards away. And again an immense wave took him down and again he struggled to come up, only to have tons of foaming water drop over him once more...

Things went on like this for a long, long time — how long the lad never knew. But he felt that the fatigue that was now overtaking him would be his last; felt it would be better to let go, and not to struggle any more; felt that there would be rest and release in drowning. But then the unconquerable strength of life, fury and obstinacy again surged within him, and he began a new and cunning struggle with the waves. He drew away from the boat in self-defence when he saw them approaching and pulled himself up for a rest upon the overturned craft when it seemed to him that there would

be a few moments' respite. He took hold of the ropes for support when the crests of foam drew near and swam before the prow of the boat that it shouldn't strike him as it was swung over. And he struggled tirelessly with the waves and the boat as if struggling with hostile, living creatures. He had never known that he had so much strength. Nor did he know it now, for he was not thinking of himself. His thoughts were as turbulent as the waves: they glided homeward, returned to Uncle Filoftei whom the water had released from the boat, and whose body floated only a little way away, sometimes striking against Trofim's; then all his thoughts were completely swamped by a strained, dominating will to oppose and triumph over his peril, in that dizzying roar of the waves that met him with their full impact, as if of a collapsing wall.

✦

What had happened to him he hardly knew. He was tired, frozen, benumbed, dazed. He swam unconsciously. Looking skywards towards the south — or was it the north? — he saw the sky was blue, the waves calming. The wind was still blowing, but it was not so cold now and coming from the opposite direction; that was why the crests of foam rose less high, and curtains of spray were no longer tossed about; that was why for some time he had felt more secure from being drowned by every wave. He clambered on to the hull of the upturned boat and rested there, his cheek on the tarred, uneven timber — for sand had been mixed with the tar. Then he let himself into the water and tried to right the boat. It seemed impossible that he should ever do it. He tried a second time and nearly righted it. The third time the boat turned over heavily and came

right side up. But it was full of water and on the point of sinking. Adam Jora climbed into it and, shoulder deep in water, groped for the baler which Filoftei had fastened to the boat. Stiff and face downward Filoftei and Trofim floated on the water. The lad began to bale, and went on until evening. The sun was now setting in a clear sky, the water was like blue steel and the waves rolled almost gently. When Adam Jora had baled out the water from the boat, he untied a pair of oars and shipped them. He did everything mechanically, aware of nothing, as in a dream. Had a finger been severed from his hand he would not have felt it. And if anybody had looked upon him they would never have recognized him.

He leaned over the side of the boat, pulled at one of the ropes and Trofim's body came up to the boat. It looked submissive like a fish, so compliant it was. A dead man... Trofim! Adam took him by the arms, drew him into the boat and laid him down. Then he drew Filoftei and also laid him in the boat. The eyes of both were open. Adam closed them. A twisted piece of cotton with a small iron cross hung around Filoftei's neck issuing from under his shirt. Adam placed it back under the shirt on the wet hair of Filoftei's chest. Then he slipped his fingers under Trofim's collar. The cotton and cross were there too. All the Danilofca fishermen wore such a cross in those days. Adam had one as well; his mother had given it him with her blessing. He felt for it with his hand. His cross was no longer there. The cotton had probably snapped while he was struggling in the water and the cross had gone. He shrugged his shoulders. What good was it? Those two had their crosses.

He sat on the seat in front of them, his hands on his knees, looking at them. Now that their eyes were no

longer open they seemed to be sleeping or feigning sleep, for Filoftei showed his teeth a little in what looked like a smile. Gradually the loss came home to him and he felt something choking him. Suddenly he began to cry, swaying to and fro, and he stammered sorrowfully:

"What have you done? Uncle Filoftei... Trofim... what have you done? What? Oh, what?" What had they been guilty of? How had they sinned?

Nobody answered him. The cry of sea-gulls came from some hundred yards away. Who knows what they had found? There was silence in the boat. Adam sighed and felt a sort of peace creeping over him. Then, when it grew dark and Charles' Wain was seen to shine, and right above him, the Loadstar, Adam Jora, his strength exhausted, began to row slowly, very slowly to the westward where he would strike land.

V

All through the days of the storm, and for most hours of the day, white specks appeared on the dark horizon: they were the scudding sails of the boats running homeward before the storm. On the shore of Danilofca, pale with sleeplessness, their hands across their mouth, their skirts fluttering before them in the wind and clinging to their legs behind, the fishermen's wives waited. The boats glided like arrows under their bits of wind-filled sail, and, as they came in, perched and swayed for a moment on the white crests, then capsized in the huge waves that broke upon the beaches. The women on the shore rushed screaming to meet their men, who, drenched and with faces blue and haggard with cold and fatigue, struggled through the

waist-deep water. They drew their boats ashore, the women lending a hand, and then made their way towards the village. The women whose husbands had not yet come, spread over the shore, keeping their mouth covered with their hand and staring at the leaden horizon.

Continually the fishermen came in, boat following boat, sometimes two and three at a time. Those which had been driven too far out to sea put in at Sf. Gheorghe, others at Mamaia, or below Cape Midia for shelter, and others south of Tuzla. When the storm was over and most of them were home, the men began to count on their fingers those who had not returned. Four boats were missing. Two were washed up on the shore with the drowned men tied to them, and one — it was discovered a little later — had taken shelter in a Bulgarian port. No trace could be found of the fourth, which was the property of Eftei Danilov.

Then, two days after the storm, news came that the fourth boat was not sunk; but that two of the men in it had been drowned, while the third had saved himself — an unheard-of thing. Filoftei Romanov's son and one of Trofim Popov's brothers set out in their carts to bring back the live man and the bodies. Filoftei's wife, Trofim's wife and mother, and Adam Jora's mother all waited at the far end of the village none knowing which of the three men was alive.

It was late in the afternoon — evening had almost set in. The plain was smooth and even, with a violet mist enshrouding it. Above it there was a single cloud — a huge, crooked, sinister thing cutting across the skies. To the right of the road was a Tartar cemetery, its tombstones so much worn by time that they were shapeless and nearly one with the earth, though what remained

threw out long shadows that stretched over the fields and road. To the left the grey sea roared as it hurled its waves forward one after the other.

In the distance, where the plain was hidden by clouds of dust, a black speck appeared, then another: the carts. They were approaching slowly. The people, black mounds waiting at the end of the village, fell silent.

Soon the sound of horse bells could be heard. The horses were coming at a slow trot, swinging their heads with fatigue, for they were poor men's horses.

From the village beyond, the thin sound of a bell, followed by a deeper one, was heard from the two towers of the Danilofca churches whose cupolas were roofed with green copper.

The carts drew up and the people gathered round them. The women began to shriek, and weep and wail. Adam Jora's mother threw herself upon her son and folded him to her breast, great sobs shaking her. His face was pale and he looked thin and weak, as if after a severe illness; he seemed sleepy too and talked in a subdued voice.

Among the waiting men there was Eftei, the owner of the boat. Eftei was a man of importance owning an inn and fisheries. His arms akimbo, his beard — a long, grey beard — resting on his chest, he looked at Adam from under his eyebrows. This young fellow had lost him his fishing-line, and a line cost money — a great deal of money; it was worth as much as a piece of land, for it brought you an income year after year. It was a new line too, made of strong, enduring cord, which Adam would not be able to pay for in his whole life-time. The fellows had left it at sea. Eftei Danilov was annoyed, greatly annoyed on account of that loss.

Though perhaps that wretch of an Adam could be made to pay for it in some way! But how? Damn the man... There he was looking into vacancy like a fool, with his mother hanging round his neck. Of course, the only thing he cared about was his skin. Eftei Danilov considered that was not right. Was it now? Nobody seemed to bother about his line. And he himself could not raise the question of it either just then. With those fellows stretched out stiff in the cart, that beggarly crew might well be astonished that he should worry about his line. How could they understand his worries when all they knew of was work and wages? And again he looked angrily at Adam Jora who stood there unsteadily upon his feet, with his chin resting upon his chest. Yes, he looked angrily at the young fellow and indifferently at the women who lamented, at the women who were striking their cheeks with their palms, shaking their poor heads and again and again touching the cold faces of the dead. The bells continued to toll. Eftei Danilov crossed himself ostentatiously, for now they were taking the dead men from the cart. But it was only now that he became aware of the sound of bells from the tower. Turning his head, his beard blown back, he looked over his shoulders at one of the white towers with their green, onion-shaped cupolas, and, needing someone he could open his heart to, mumbled to Pricop, his eldest son:

"It's got a fine sound."

Pricop laughed and shrugged his shoulders:

"Well, it should have, you've put enough money into it... and it's that which rings so fine."

Eftei blinked and a frown creased his brow, then he smiled in his beard. He spoke gruffly:

"True... it sounds as if it had been cast in silver..."

He resumed his frown and his sedateness, and again made the sign of the cross, for the men who carried the dead were passing before him. When Adam Jora, too, passed, his mother supporting his failing steps, Eftei grimaced and turned his head aside. Then, rapping out his words which came curt and gruff, he said:

"Come along! Let's go home!"

Pricop and Simion, his two sons, followed him. They were both burly fellows and thick-boned, though they did not otherwise resemble each other. Pricop was solemn and self-controlled, with a cold, penetratting, clever look in his eyes, that seemed to mock his interlocutor sometimes, when he smiled. A moment ago, when he had answered the old man, one might or might not have observed a shade of mockery in his voice. You could never know what Pricop was thinking.

Simion, on the other hand, with his leather cap set jauntily on one ear and a red scarf around his neck, swinging his hips as he walked and swaying his broad shoulders, sang softly a love-song even now. He was all for song and dance and never cared a straw for anything else. And so it was with him now: the bells tolled for the dead, the women moaned aloud in the street, the wind whistled through the dusty, dreary atmosphere under the crooked cloud; and yet Simion hummed a song and took a lively interest in the things about him. Suddenly digging Pricop in the ribs with his elbow, he said:

"Why didn't he kick the bucket too?" and his gaze followed Adam.

Pricop looked at him and saw that there was something forbidding in Simion's mirth. His square, bony face was white with hatred. Pricop looked after Adam Jora and laughed:

"Well, but hasn't he almost kicked it? Can't you see how he looks? He'll be laid up for weeks and in any case... he'll never be a man again after what he's been through."

Simion shook his head:

"That's what you think, you don't know him."

Adam Jora had halted some ten steps away from them and stood leaning against a fence. His mother was speaking to him, her head against his breast. Now he slipped to the ground, and lay huddled up under the tall fence of grey planks.

"He seems to have grown smaller," Simion said, looking at him as if he were regarding something strange, out of the run of common things. And Pricop laughed again. They followed their broad-shouldered father. And as they passed Adam and his mother, Simion, with a tremor of hostility in his voice, spoke to the woman:

"Well, mother," he said "and when are you intending to get him married?"

But the pale-faced old woman did not hear him. Adam lay huddled up beneath the fence with closed eyes and a pinched face, looking altogether of a meaner build than was formely his. Hearing the hostility in the man's voice, he opened his eyes wearily for a moment, then his lids came down again. Simion and Pricop went on their way. The former, having taken a few steps, again began to hum his song in a clear, tenor voice.

VI

Many days had passed. Now the night was lighted by the moon. The blue-green sea sparkled beneath its mist; the black boats along the shore cast shadows on

the sand; the willows shone silvery in the darkness; the leaves of the orchard trees hardly stirred; the shadow of the tall plank fences divided the streets in two, making one way of darkness and another of light. The barking of dogs could be heard from close by, from somewhere a little farther off and very faintly, from somewhere near a mud-hut in the plain. Simion, Eftei Danilov's youngest son, came out of his father's courtyard and walked in the shadow of the fences. He walked quickly, his heart beating fast. It was late when he reached the far end of the village where the fields began. Standing under a weeping willow, whose branches hung over a fence of twigs and thistles, he whistled low. Nobody answered his whistle, but he guessed rather than saw, that someone was waiting for him. In the darkness under the willow on the other side of the fence he could make out a shape that stood there motionless. He took another couple of steps in that direction. Then over the low fence he put his arm around the shoulders of the girl waiting for him, but she drew back and Simion could only manage to get hold of her hand. He drew it towards him.

"No, let me be," the girl whispered. "Let me be." Breathing hard, he drew her towards him savagely; he tried to kiss her, but the girl kept him at arm's length.

"It was wrong of me to come," she said slowly. "I shouldn't have come..."

"And why not?" Simion asked with a little laugh. "Don't you like me?"

"I do," the girl said, wrenching herself away from him. "I do, but not this way..."

He could hardly see her in the darkness. She was a tall girl with a slim waist and quick, lithe movements.

"Why did you come then?" Simion asked in a malicious and angry voice. "Why don't you stay at home and be good? You've no business to be here."

The girl was silent for a few moments... She looked at him through the darkness — looked him straight in the face.

Then: "No... I don't like you," she said. "Perhaps I should like you if... if I were different..."

"If he didn't court you..."

"Who's he? It isn't true, anyway."

"I know who... and so do you! You know very well," Simion murmured angrily. "Ha, ha! and you pretend you're so innocent, yet come here to be courted by me too... what a disgraceful hussy you are!"

And he began to use shameful words and swear at her spitefully. However, he still tried to draw her to him in the dark. He did catch her and held her tight in his arms, although the pointed twigs of the fence pricked them both. But suddenly the girl pushed him away with unexpected strength and released herself from his embrace. Her face was close to his and he could see it in the moonlight with the black curves of the eyebrows beneath a wide forehead and the liquid sparkle of her grey eyes which seemed black now and which, at that moment, looked beyond him both frightened and eager. Observing her look, Simion suddenly let her go and turned about. A tall shadow was coming towards them from the middle of the road. Simion hesitated a moment, then took a few determined steps towards the newcomer. They faced each other.

"What have you come here for?" Simion asked.

"You were glad I very nearly died!" the other said. "It's no good, Simion. Even if I'd been drowned she wouldn't have you!"

As he uttered these words in hatred and defiance, he leant over towards Simion.

"No good !" he repeated. "She won't have you ! She wants me, not you !"

Unable to control himself, Simion struck him full in the face and followed up this blow by one in the ribs. The tall fellow withdrew a little and Simion now lunged forward, landing vigorous blows on his chest, and trying to get him below the belt. Suddenly the tall fellow shuddered and drew his head down between his shoulders. Then, gathering himself together, while Simion was again making a dash for him, he suddenly grasped his adversary by the hair with one hand — Simion had come on so quickly that his leather cap had fallen off — and took hold of the man's belt with the other. Rallying all his strength and grunting in the effort, he raised Simion over his head and sent him flying as if he had been a heavy sack. For a short space Simion remained on the ground where he had fallen some distance away. Then, groaning, he picked himself up with difficulty. But the other was soon upon him and, clutching him as before by the hair, punched him first on the temple and then on the mouth. Panting and groaning Simion was hitting back, blindly and passionately, but, suddenly, he felt himself again lifted by the belt and flung through the air to land now on the stones of the village street. This time he lay on the ground a little longer; and when he had raised himself on an elbow, the tall fellow was standing over him grabbing him once more by the collar and belt. For the third time he threw him upwards with the grunt of a docker heaving a heavy sack, and sent him speeding skywards, and now, when Simion fell, he remained motionless. The other drew near him, and, breathing painfully, stooped and kicked him aside. Only

then did Simion sit up, spitting out something black into the white, moonlit dust of the street. Then he wiped his nose with the back of his hand, and his hand against his trousers. A kick in the ribs from the tall fellow now caused Simion to hiccup, after which he rose in stages, first on all fours, then on his knees, and finally stood up, unsteadily. For a moment, he looked at the other, then turned on his heels and went away limping. In a few moments he had disappeared in the darkness.

Alone at last, the tall fellow sought to recover his breath, for he was panting and was bent double in pain. He walked slowly to the fence, rested his arms on it for support and let his head hang over the other side. He felt extremely tired.

Later, he lifted up his head and called out in a faint voice:

"Uliana."

The girl was still there in the darkness under the willow; she had not moved. The young man looked at his hand, and was sickened by the sight of it; it was still wet with the spit and blood of Simion when he had struck him across his open mouth. He wiped his fist against his hip, then murmured again:

"Uliana... "

She answered from a distance without moving:

"What do you want?"

"Why didn't you wait for me?" he asked. He had spoken sadly, which seemed to irritate Uliana instead of moving her to sympathy.

"Why should I wait for you?" she answered passionately. "You have been home for many days now and have not even tried to speak to me! One can't even set eyes on you, and yet I must wait for you!"

"I have been ill," he said below his breath.

"You were ill at the beginning!" she answered still passionately. "But later you were not too ill to walk. If you'd loved me, you'd have come to me even though it had killed you to do so!"

She was silent for a moment and then added more gently:

"At least you could have sent me some word, Adam!"

Adam bent his head again and, murmured bitterly:

"You're wronging me, Uliana. You're torturing me without cause... Don't you understand what you are to me? You're the blood in my veins and the marrow in my bones. When I was with poor Filoftei and Trofim out at sea and thought we should all drown, I didn't worry so much about that as about the thought of having to leave you... I felt as though something was being torn apart within my breast, just like this, slowly, slowly; and it hurt, oh! how it hurt!"

Slowly he unbuttoned his shirt as if he found it hard to breathe and was overcoming a great difficulty with a painful effort. Uliana had drawn near and was listening to him, her eyes cast to the ground. She looked up only to let her eyes rest upon his big hands which tugged at his shirt.

"I was sorry, Uliana, to die, and not to have loved you, as a man should love a woman. When the weather was fine, and we slept peacefully in the boat I would think of you; how we used to embrace and kiss... And in the morning I would awake before the others and look at the vanishing stars, until the morning star alone was left, shining as big as my fist; and I always remembered how it was when we two were together and how it would be..."

He folded her gently in his arms and Uliana let herself be held close, without resisting. Adam whispered:

"And when I thought I might drown before you had been mine, Uliana... it was terrible, terrible... it almost broke my heart to think of it..."

"Hush," she murmured looking down, "don't speak like that, it makes me ashamed..."

But she smiled a hardly perceptible smile. And Adam, putting his hands under her arms while she drew her skirts about her that they might not be caught in the twigs, raised her over the fence. Then, placing his arm around her shoulders, they passed together through the shadows. Not far away was a gulley overgrown with willows and sedge through which ran a cart-track where the dust was thick and the earth churned up by the wheels of many carts. Adam and Uliana, both barefoot, walked noiselessly along it.

They looked for the place they knew, under the hollow willows in the shelter of the thick sedge. Here, too, grew rough-leaved weeds, and hemlock with thick, juicy stems which, as they sat next to each other, were heard to crush noisily. Adam stroked her cheeks gently, awkwardly, with his big, thick, calloused hands, while Uliana now looked at him—this was the first time she had looked into his eyes — and remained thus, lost, without an eyelid drooping.

"Another time you must wait for me," Adam whispered hoarsely, "another time you must wait, no matter what happens."

She nodded assent slowly; another time she would wait for him, no matter how long, no matter what happened; suddenly her eyes filled with tears, which began trickling down her cheeks and, laying her head upon his shoulder, she murmured in a choking voice:

"Don't go to sea again before we're married... don't ever go again..."

Adam laughed weakly:

"I'll fish only on the lake... never go to sea any more..." and he began to kiss her cheeks, her eyes and forehead; then he kissed her on the mouth and bit her lips so that she gave a smothered cry. Together they slid to the ground, breathing hard and struggling in their embrace. Closer and closer he pressed her to him until in another moment she would have been his, but Uliana wriggled away from him like a serpent. Suddenly, however, she ceased struggling and, letting her head rest helplessly upon Adam's breast, spoke clearly, pleadingly, sadly:

"No, Adam, please don't..."

If she had spoken with passion and had gone on struggling, Adam would not have heeded her. He would have forced her to do his will. But her tone stayed him and suddenly his embrace relaxed. He drew away from her and in a dry voice — his throat was dry as if parched with thirst — asked:

"Why do you say that?"

She covered her legs with her skirts and drew her blouse together for it had come undone. She murmured shyly:

"Without wedlock... it isn't right, Adam..."

He drew still further away resting on his elbow. He plucked a blade of grass and began to nibble at it. Then suddenly he rested his head on her knees and groaned:

"Uliana... Uliana, you make me suffer... I'm weary of waiting for you... it is as if my very soul was parched within me, and you held out a cup of water to me but would not let me drink. Why do you torture me so? What have I done to you? Why, why?"

She stroked his face unconsciously with her light yet rough palm, and murmured:

"Don't be angry with me... forgive me... my dear... forgive me..."

He sank on his back lying still for a moment, trying to pull himself together. The pale moon filtering through the leaves shone on his face. They were both children of poor folk who had been working since early childhood, and the sun, rain and wind had weathered them; yet here, in the darkness beneath the willows, with the moonlight touching their faces, their flesh seemed immaterial, delicate like the petals of a flower: fresh, cool and fragrant. That's how Adam saw Uliana when he opened his eyes; the girl had been looking at him as he lay resting, noting his thin face and closed eyes; now she leaned over him and kissed him full on the mouth, then, lifting his head from her lap and drawing away from him, said hurriedly as if afraid of something unknown, some imminent danger:

"Come, let's go... come along, we must go..."

Adam did not move, but Uliana jumped to her feet and started off alone. Then Adam picked himself up too and followed her with a sigh, yet with a strange feeling of serenity.

They walked back together, holding each other close and stayed long at the fence beneath the willow, unable to tear themselves apart. At last they separated agreeing to meet the following night at the same place.

"I shall be waiting for you," Uliana said, standing in the darkness, her eyes following him as he walked away — a long shadow in the moonlight — now and again turning round to look at her over his shoulder.

VII

Simion Danilov returned home limping and unsteady. He set his jaws in hatred and humiliation, clenched his fists and groaned in impotent fury, mumbling words without a sequence. He entered the yard and house hardly aware of what he was doing. Scenting his clothes, the dogs rushed at him but did not bark; they drew away whining a little and wagging their tails. Somehow Simion got into the house; the door opened into a narrow, glass-walled passage that ran the whole of its length and led straight to the little room where he slept with his brother Pricop. Still shaky upon his feet, he closed the door, much against his will, with a bang. Pricop turned over though without waking. He had left the lamp burning, lowering its flame. The room, with walls painted blue — an ugly, violet shade of blue — smelt damp; it was always cold there; the walls oozed dampness and cold. Pricop's clothes were hung on a nail driven into the wall, and his boots were under a chair. Pricop slept on his face in a wide bed of old wood, covered with a big, red padded quilt, his head under the icons of beaten silver. (The faces of the saints were black with age and seemed frowning and threatening.) Simion pulled off his dusty boots and threw them under the bed, then lowered the wick of the lamp as far as it would go. As he stood on his feet, he reeled, and groaned without intermission; his ribs, his bones, his flesh all ached. He spat a little blood upon the floor and rubbed it in with the sole of his foot.

The boots had struck against the leg of the bed which had caused Pricop to open his right eye — the eye that was not in the pillow — and look at Simion with a blurred gaze. Simion got into bed, his face all

bruised and distorted with pain and anger. Trying to stifle his groans he found he was speaking to himself. Pricop now raised his face from the pillow which was wet with sweat, and opened his other eye.

"What the devil's the matter with you?" he asked in a sleepy voice. But Simion did not answer — merely pulled over him the heavy red quilt, and was soon sweating profusely. Pricop sat up in bed, put out a hand and shook his brother. The latter let out a howl, for Pricop had touched a sore place where he had struck the stones in the street.

"Hi, what's the matter with you?" Pricop asked again pulling the quilt off his brother's head.

Simion still did not answer, but the black, swollen eye, bruised face and torn, bloody lip spoke for themselves.

"Who's been knocking you about?" Pricop asked. Simion shrugged his shoulders, kept his eyes closed and did not say anything.

"Who was it, man?"

Simion opened his sound eye — the other was quite closed — and answered, blood gurgling in his throat:

"Jora."

Pricop made no comment, but sat up in bed, his arms about his knees and remained thus for a long time. In disjointed words, Simion told him what had happened. Pricop listened, his eyes on the door. Black beetles frightened by the flickering light of the lamp ran agitatedly across the floor.

Suddenly Pricop said with deep animosity:

"You idiot! Couldn't you have found another woman? She's got nothing but the clothes she wears. Ierofei, her father, hasn't a bean; do you hear? Not a bean. What good is she to you?"

"What's that to you?" Simion groaned, and presently with deep hatred he began swearing at Uliana using the vilest of terms, until he became exhausted. Later he sighed and said:

"I shall marry her."

Pricop gave a contemptuous laugh:

"Do you think the old man would agree to that?"

'The old man' was their father, Eftei Danilov.

"I don't care if he doesn't," Simion answered, his lips tight. "I'll marry her even though I have to beg for my bread at the end of the village, like Ibraim, the blind beggar. Oh, oh !"

He turned over to the other side, complaining. Pricop looked at him and then at the door and began to think of Adam Jora. He thought for a long time. At first he felt that sleep had deserted him. Then tremors of excitement went through him. His muscles became taut. His heart beat quickly. He pictured himself coming up against Adam. It would be himself this time and not Simion. He would meet Adam and tell him a few things. He would box his ears, spit in his face, knock him down and trample upon him. 'Who do you think you are?' he would say. 'Are you the master in this village? You miserable cur ! You beggarly wretch who could only work because we took pity on you; using our boat and losing our fishing-line, too, you swine !' Yes, he would trample him underfoot, crush him under the heels of his boots. 'You dared to raise your hand against my brother, did you?' he would say. 'Dared to strike him? You worthless beggar, you two-penny-ha-penny loafer ! Well, we'll cut off your hand to teach you to behave. Going after women, too — you n'er-do-well !'

Pricop was trembling with excitement. There was in him a fierce desire to have Adam at his mercy, to thrust

a knife into him, into his soft flesh where steel penetrates as in butter.

But that was impossible. The gendarmes would arrest you and you'd be taken to jail, sentenced, and the old man would have to pay good money to lawyers; and even in the best case you'd have to do a few years; and after that the people of the village would cut you; nobody'd look at you any more. Nobody'd laugh with you... No, that wouldn't do. A thrashing was the only thing — but one he'd remember all his life. After which he should lie in bed in a worse plight than Simion was in now.

But who was to thrash him? He hadn't quarrelled with any of the village fellows. There was no one to set on him; he was everyone's friend.

That left only the two of them: Pricop and Simion. But Simion would be in bed for a few days. For a week maybe. Listen to his groans. That left only Pricop; Pricop himself would give him that thrashing.

He again pictured himself meeting Adam Jora and showering blows upon him mercilessly. But somehow, that seemed difficult to carry out. Something was wrong somewhere. Adam was a whole head taller than either of them and there was a devil in him. He was patient at first and let you hit him for a time, but when that devil took possession of him and maddened him you were done for.

He shook Simion who groaned again.

"How was it, man? Did he throw you up?"

Simion mumbled something in a hoarse voice. 'Flying up, through the air, like a sack!' Pricop went on thinking.

No, he couldn't do anything to Adam Jora.

He sweated with a weakling's fury and got out of bed, in his red check shirt and pants tied at the ankles, to

blow out the lamp. For a time he remained thus in the darkness. He was helpless; there was nothing he could do to Adam Jora. From the bed under the quilt, that was too warm in that room where the walls were always damp, Simion's breath came like a rattle.

Going to the door, Pricop went into the passage where the fishing-tackle stood propped against the wall together with a net which formed a bundle in a corner, and opened the door of the glass verandah at the other end; the dogs snarled suddenly.

"Who's there?" a thick voice called.

"It's me, father, Pricop."

Eftei sat on a bench under a vine whose faded leaves climbed up the side of the house facing the village street. He sat there in a big, white shirt, his hands on his knees. Pricop went down the two steps and to the back of the house; he relieved nature against the wall of the stables and returned to sit down beside his father.

"What is it, father?"

"I ate some sausages preserved in lard, and they seem to have upset me; I can't sleep," Eftei Danilov said in his beard. His nape was straight and hairy, and his throat thick and all covered with beard; his mouth buried in his beard, he spoke in a deep voice, as though from a well overgrown by a shrub.

"I've been tossing about in bed, thinking of things I've never thought about since I was born... When I saw how things were, I told myself: 'I'd better get outdoors for a breather...' "

Pricop was thinking that the old man was not himself to speak so much. He had said more in these few moments than in a whole week. Eftei Danilov always snapped at his sons never wasting words on them: 'To

work!' he would say. Or 'Go home now!' Or 'Away with you, you idlers!' And that was all.

"So you've been thinking of all manner of things, father?"

"Yes, I've been thinking of so many things that I got to wondering how it was I hadn't forgotten them," Eftei Danilov answered, still in the mood for talk and unexpectedly benevolent.

Pricop sighed in order to keep from laughing. He felt like laughing, but not on account of the change he noticed in his father. He felt like laughing because suddenly a great light shone in his head. He was trembling, he realized he was trembling.

"Yes, yes," he mumbled chokingly. "Yes, I too have been thinking of all manner of things... But I bet, you haven't thought of one thing."

"And what's that?" Eftei asked with a frown.

The faded vine leaves gave a sharp rustle. Dogs barked hoarsely somewhere at the far end of the village.

"You haven't thought how it was Adam Jora came out alive and the other two were drowned?"

Eftei Danilov did not answer. He never even breathed. He sat in his shirt on the bench with his fat body lax, his heavy hands resting on his knees.

"When has such a thing ever happened before?" Pricop asked. "Never since the world's creation. Either the three of them have come out alive or the three of them have drowned. Isn't that so?"

Eftei still didn't answer.

"Tell me, isn't that so?"

"Come on, out with it," the old man mumbled.

"I've been thinking a great deal, father, and now I know how it was, as if I had been with them in the boat. They quarrelled, heaven knows about what, maybe

this Jora told them they'd better do some smuggling because it is more profitable, and Filoftei — you know how religious he was, always speaking about God — refused. They quarrelled, came to blows and the one who was stronger, as strong as a bull, threw the other into the water. He probably struck him on the head with the oar first, then drowned him."

"But what about Trofim?" Eftei Danilov asked cantankerously. "What was Trofim doing? Can't you see you're talking nonsense?"

"Trofim was stupid and helpless. And by the time he understood what it was all about and joined the fray, Filoftei had been done away with. And then, bang, came a blow with the heavy end of the oar right on Trofim's forehead."

They both fell silent.

"The storm was his luck," Pricop said. "That devil's lucky. So nobody thought any harm, although everybody was surprised..."

Pricop was still trembling. He felt cold. A light, fresh wind blew in from the sea; the vine leaves stirred restlessly, giving a dry rustle; the crickets could no longer be heard, their chirp being drowned in the sound of the waves that broke upon the shore.

"Maybe it wasn't like that, maybe it was as he said, or different," Pricop mumbled with disgust. "Who can know? I speak as my head prompts me..."

And he fell into a discontented silence. He would have liked a smoke but felt he'd better not go and fetch a cigarette. He missed something — as if he had lost or forgotten it. Eftei Danilov suddenly asked wrathfully and in hatred:

"So that's the sort of man he is, is it?"

"The fact is, " Pricop went on, "he's off his chump. That's as true as I'm alive," he added firmly. "And Heaven help you if you come to grips with him."

"Stuff and nonsense," the old man replied contemptuously.

"Nonsense, you say? Come with me and look at your son Simion."

"What do you mean, come and look at Simion?" the old man snapped, raising his beard towards Pricop, and rolling his eyes under his thick eyebrows. "And why do you lie and talk such rot? You're a liar, that's certain !"

"Come and see for yourself," Pricop said. "Just come !"

Simion was half asleep and half in a dizzy wakefulness. In his sleepy state he dreamt that he was fighting a host of people; that his teeth had been knocked out and others were growing in their place. That the house had caught fire and the flames were blinding him. But he also heard the strangely calm voices of his father and Pricop. Finally he became fully awake. The room was darkened by the huge shadows of Eftei and Pricop on the walls. They stood at the foot of the bed, the old man holding a lamp in his hand which lighted up his big shirt and made his beard glint like shining copper. He looked down on Simion in frowning severity. The silver cross sparkled on the shaggy hair of his chest through his open shirt. Pricop who stood by him in his red nightshirt and pants, looked slim in comparison and there was a strange quality about him. He looked at Simion as a stranger might, with indifference. Actually he was more bent on discovering the old man's feelings. The lamp in Eftei's hand shook slightly, and its movements were reflected in the unsteady shadows on the walls. Suddenly Eftei turned on his heels and went out with Pricop

behind him, leaving the room in utter darkness; and the only sound came from the sharp creaking of the beetles' thin legs running across the floor. In the room the raw smell of dampness persisted. Simion drew the quilt over his head to which the hair stuck with sweat, and resumed his troubled dreams.

VIII

That night Eftei Danilov and his son Pricop talked for a long time. The next day the head gendarme of Danilofca came to the pub for a drink of plum brandy before the midday meal. The pub was a big house with a roofing of rust-red sheet iron and wide eaves supported by pillars. Under those eaves a cart could take shelter; they gave plenty of shade, and Eftei, the publican, had placed two tables there. The sergeant sat down at one of these tables and looked at the scene in the street: the carts and waggons passing in clouds of dust; the children playing and the dogs fighting. A drunken fisherman with dusty boots came reeling down the road, and four girls with pink shawls holding each other round the waist went along singing a wonderful song in three voices; in fact he looked upon everything that could be seen in the streets of Danilofca in those times on an autumn day.

However he was not long left alone, for Eftei appeared above him, on the threshold of the pub:

"Come right in, Sergeant. Why stay out there? The flies are a pest — stinging like the devil: the weather will surely change. Come in, it's cleaner inside."

The sergeant went up the two worn stonesteps hollowed out in the middle, and into the coolness and shade within the pub. Eftei kept the iron shutters closed so the

only light that filtered in came through the door and the window in the opposite wall that gave on to the courtyard. The metal covering of the counter shone with little pools of spilt drinks; on one of the walls were hung a big framed photograph of the king with all his decorations across his breast, and one of the queen with her pearl crown upon her head and a pearl necklace round her neck. A smell of wine, plum brandy and casks permeated the place; strings of dried figs, carobs and candles hung from strings; on some of the shelves there were boxes of grocery goods and packets of cigarettes and matches; and there were also lamp chimneys, but on most of the shelves stood bottles in which yellow, green and whitish liquid shone.

The smell of wine and casks was strongest in a corner where, under its iron-covered lid which had been left open, gaped the cellar. It was near this opening that Eftei Danilov made the sergeant sit down, calling out at the same time:

"Siomca, bring some plum brandy! The kind I spoke to you about. Take the candle and go quickly!" And a moment after he roared in a thick voice: "Aren't you back yet?"

Then, without giving any more thought to Siomca — the scared, barefooted little fellow who had dived into the cellar, a lighted candle in his hand — Eftei went and scooped some caviar from a keg with a spoon; he put it on a plate, cut a few slices of bread and set the plate, the bread and two glasses on the table. Siomca returned with a jug of plum brandy. Eftei Danilov gave a deep sigh as he sat down and poured brandy into the glasses:

"It is made from the plum stones too! It has an almond flavour, you'll see."

And stroking his beard, he added:

"I made it the year my eldest son, Pricop, was born..."

"It's old brandy then, Uncle Eftei!"

Eftei Danilov gravely nodded his head which seemed to be carved in stone:

"Twenty-five years," he said. "Here... help yourself to caviar — it's fresh."

"I refuse to drink unless you do too, Uncle Eftei."

Eftei bowed towards the east wall where there were shelves with bottles of cheap brandy, paraffin lamps and boxes of maccaroni, then raised his glass of plum brandy full to the brim.

"May God grant us good luck — good luck and happiness!" he said solemnly and gulped it down. Then he wiped his moustache and beard, and looked upon the sergeant who drank more slowly, choking at times and every now and then letting the breath out of his mouth to cool it as he laughed:

"Why, it's like fire! Terrible stuff!"

"That's how we peasants make it," Eftei said deprecatingly and poured out another two glasses.

"Have some more caviar." He raised his glass again: "Good luck, and all the best to you," he added.

The sergeant was at the pub for fully six hours. When the sun had sunk low over the steppe striking a greenish-golden light from the towers of the Danilofca church, he came out on the pub's verandah. He was red in the face and sweating; and there was a glassy look in his eyes as he tightened his belt. With his rifle across his shoulder, he turned towards Eftei Danilov and said in a voice of command:

"It is as I've told you! There's no doubt whatever! He's the man!"

Towering above him, his hands in his belt, his bushy beard over his chest, Eftei shrugged his shoulders:

"I really couldn't say; I only told you what I've been thinking..."

He also had drunk too much, but beyond a turbid look in his eyes, there was nothing to show that he was drunk; he merely seemed to be in low spirits and more callous. The gendarme however was worked up. He rapped out his words volubly:

"You don't know, Eftei man, you don't know about these things. That's my province. A hint is enough to make me know my man and...smell a rat."

Eftei did not answer. He waited until the gendarme had gone, then had Simion throw a bucketful of cold water just drawn from the well over his head and neck.

The sergeant went straight to the station, got hold of the two gendarmes on duty and set out with them along the village street. The drink gave him a joyous feeling. He felt that everything would be ship-shape, that he would be promoted to sergeant major, and transferred to headquarters where he might do some good business. And everything due to the tricky affair he had just discovered. He was so pleased with himself that he entered the tiny courtyard of Adam Jora's mother with almost a merry look. The old woman came out of the house to meet him and the sergeant addressed her benevolently:

"Good evening, mother. Is your son at home?"

"What do you want him for?" she asked suspiciously.

The sound of wood being chopped came from behind the house. The sergeant made his way thither, followed by the two gendarmes and the old woman. Adam Jora saw him and straightened up slowly from his bent position over the log, the axe in his right hand and a willow branch in his left. He was surprised and suspicious. The

sergeant's eyes went to the dark steel of the axe, with its shiny surface where it had been sharpened with the file. His mirth oozed out of him. With an effort he spoke in a friendly tone: "Good evening," and he raised his hand to his cap in vague greeting. Adam had followed his glance and with disdainful indifference stuck the axe into the log.

"Good evening to you," he answered.

The gendarme drew near, all benevolence still:

"Listen, Adam, you must come with us..."

He spoke lightly as if of an unimportant matter. Just as lightly he placed his hand on the axe, drew it out of the log and passed it to one of the gendarmes.

"You're wanted at the station!" he suddenly snapped out in a commanding, brutal tone.

Adam Jora said:

"He hit me first, Sergeant! I swear on my soul, he hit me first!"

The gendarme gave a start and his heart began to beat hard. So it was true? He asked quickly, his eyes searching Adam's face:

"Who's hit you first? Filoftei or Trofim?"

Adam remained motionless, as if petrified, his mouth agape. Suddenly he paled, his face turning a bluish-white unhealthy hue.

"No... I... no," he stammered.

The sergeant spoke nervously, quickly taking his rifle from his shoulder:

"Did you hear him? One of the two hit him first — that's what he says. Did you see how he paled? Remember that, and report on it. You're under arrest: if you try to get away, I'll shoot. Fix bayonets! What are you waiting for? Fix bayonets! Come on, get going, forward, march!"

When Adam Jora passed along the village street between the bayonets — he was a full head taller than the gendarmes — his mother lamenting behind him as if following a funeral, people stopped on their way and followed the procession asking the head gendarme what it was all about. The latter, perspiring copiously, his face all red, and still giddy with drink, hope, and the fear of having made a mistake, roared out:

"Out of the way ! Don't crowd the street !"

He locked Adam in a room at the station behind barred windows with thick shutters and put a padlock on the door. Outside, Adam's mother lay by the ditch along the road and cried. She cried quietly now, her old face against the trunk of a mulberry-tree, and with closed eyes, having become tired of wailing. Uliana, Ierofei's daughter, came late at night and passed by the station; later she knocked on the shutters. But the gendarme threatened her with his rifle and drove both women away.

Adam sat down on the earthen floor, his back against the wall, his hands tied, his mind a blank. When he realized what he was charged with, fear took possession of him. It terrified him that such an insane charge should be brought against him. How could anyone think of such a thing? Those who knew him and knew Filoftei who was goodness itself, and Trofim — stupid, kindly Trofim — how could they believe such a thing? Even the head gendarme knew them all. Was he going mad, suffering a nightmare? Finally, he told himself that they would see reason and let him go. As every night before falling asleep, he thought of Uliana and remembered all their trysts.

Some time towards two o'clock the gendarmes woke him up, sticking their boots into his ribs. They brought

a chair and a lamp with them. The sergeant sat on the chair, another put the lamp on the window-sill. And then they set on him to make him confess how he had killed Filoftei and Trofim. In his pain and anger, Adam roared out:

"What could I have had against them? I loved Filoftei like my own father!" But they did not believe him. They struck him with their fists, kicked him, and then used their belts and sticks on him. After a time Adam was silent, never uttering a syllable. Only when the blows were too painful he groaned.

That evening people had come out to their fences and had spoken among themselves, while the sky had grown a violent red, fading only when the stars came out. Most of them did not believe the accusation. Filoftei Romanov's sons had been Adam's friends; now on his account they quarrelled and nearly came to blows. One of them swore he would kill Adam with his own hands, the second said that they couldn't know what had happened, and Emelian, the eldest, roared out in a fury that the devil had taken possession of them all and maddened them: How could they believe that Adam could do such a thing? So they were still at a loss what to do. On the other hand, Trofim Popov's wife was a friend of Eftei Danilov's daughters; she came to them for advice: what was she to think of the whole affair? They told her what she was to think, and she went about visiting her neighbours and lamenting everywhere.

The second and the third day, the whole week in fact, the villagers talked of nothing but the arrest: some of them came to threaten the sergeant, others got drunk to forget their sadness, others thrashed their wives because they were angry with themselves for not knowing what to believe, and the young fellows of the village came

to blows with the friends of Pricop and Simion Danilov who said Adam was guilty.

One day the gendarmes took Adam away in a cart — early in the morning so that no one might see him — to the penitentiary in the town.

The case was tried in early winter in a little town of North-Dobruja. Blocks of ice floated on the Danube; the waters were greyish-yellow with a cold shine on them, reflecting the sullen winter sky. The town sprawled along a bank of yellow earth; it had snowed but only very little and the cutting wind raised that yellow earth into clouds of dust over the desolate steppe with its dead weeds. In the fields, the curtains of sedge that made up the shepherds' settlements trembled as gusts of wind struck against them; in the town the few passers-by walked hurriedly, stooping, their hands in their pockets and their heads between their shoulders, along the cobbled streets between the low houses with their flat, tiled roofs. It was a sad, poverty-stricken town, of sad, poverty-stricken people.

The Court was a whitewashed room with dirty walls and a low ceiling: a paraffin lamp with a shade of flowered china, so fly-blown that it looked black, hung from the ceiling. Behind the judges, high upon the wall, hung the photo of the king, his breast covered with decorations, and of the queen with her pearl crown upon her head and pearl necklace round her neck. On the table in front of the judges was a black, painted wooden cross. On one side were the jury, and on the other was Adam Jora and his inconsequential lawyer, appointed by the Court. It was in the afternoon; the presiding judge had a weak stomach and the afternoon hours were extremely painful to him. He sat doubled up, his elbows resting on the table, his face of an earthen hue and frowning,

suffering severely. He could only listen by fits and starts; and in order to make believe he had carefully listened all through, he spoke sharply to the prisoner, the witnesses and the counsel for defence. An oppressive silence prevailed in the room; the air was stifling and foul with the press of people in it, for a great many had come from Danilofca.

When it was the turn of Trofim's wife to bear witness, she cursed Adam freely. The next witness, Filoftei Romanov's wife, whose sons were older than Adam, looked at him and began to cry; her heart pitied him, so young and so thin now. She could only say that she knew nothing, then began to weep so pitifully that they took her from the room. She had thought of her sons and her heart had ached at sight of Adam. The jury were moved; they thought she was crying upon seeing her husband's murderer, and looked fiercely at Adam.

One of Filoftei's sons, a burly fellow with broad and massive shoulders, snub nose and ruffled hair, came before the judge, took the cross in his hands and spoke with heat and daring:

"Your Honour, I...I..."

"Your name?" the judge asked. "And what have you to say?"

"I am Emelian Romanov; Filoftei Romanov was my father. Your Honour, I..."

"Speak when you are spoken to!" the judge called out to him. "Are you, or aren't you part of the prosecution?"

"I don't know what that may be," the young fellow said roughly, nearly insolently. "I don't know what that is, but I've got nothing against Adam Jora. He didn't do anything. I'm a fisherman too, and I know: he's not guilty. It's impossible he should be!".

"Silence!" the judge roared. "Silence! You're no witness!"

"But I am. I bear witness before the men of the village," the fisherman answered angrily, sullenly. "I bear witness before anyone! He is not the man to have drowned my father. The women have grown mad and they tried to rope me in too. But it is not right! Don't condemn him for you're sinning against him and you'll pay for it!"

"Hold your peace, you insolent fellow! Turn him out!"

The gendarmes hustled him out. While fighting them, Emelian Romanov turned towards the Court and shouted:

"Forgive me, Adam, forgive me, Adam! I'm not to blame! Forgive me! Forgive us all!"

Adam Jora turned towards him eyes that looked bigger now that they had sunk deep into their orbits and answered nothing. He was looking about the Court like an owl, looking at all the faces as if in search of someone. He was trying to discover Uliana. Uliana was not there.

They sentenced Adam Jora to hard labour. Three years went by. People began to forget him. The head gendarme was promoted and moved to a post in the town. Eftei Danilov continued to deal in fish. In 1944 he had fifty head of cattle and several boats, as well as fisheries and two of the six pubs in Danilofca.

In the spring after Adam Jora's trial Pricop quarrelled with his father. Since that autumn, when the two of them had talked things over till far into the night, he had begun to be less submissive and more free with his father. He answered him back, did not obey the old man's orders, was sneering, cold and insolent. In the

spring they quarrelled over a mere trifle. The old man struck him in the face, very nearly knocking him down. Pricop rushed at him, threatening him with his fist, but Simion pushed him aside. Pricop packed some clothes in a box and slipped away. Later the old man missed some gold coins he kept for a case of emergency — for he had others buried in the ground. Nobody saw Pricop any more and the rumour went that he had embarked as a sailor on a Turkish vessel and had gone heaven knows where.

When Adam was taken into custody, Uliana, Ierofei's daughter, had fallen ill, with high temperature, and had hardly recovered when he was sentenced. She had caught typhoid fever which caused her hair to fall, and left her thin and pale and unsightly. She never went outside their courtyard, never went anywhere, except to Adam's mother.

Two years later, Adam's mother died. Uliana had fully recovered her health and grown more beautiful than formerly. Only she was pale, sad and spiteful.

For two more years she remained unmarried. Her parents and brothers never spoke to her... She shamed them by not marrying. Eftei Danilov came to ask her in marriage for his son, but Uliana said for everyone to hear, that she was waiting for Adam, that she had sworn before all the icons in church to wait for him. She was lying: she had not sworn in church, but among the hemlock and the weeds at night under the willows; she had not sworn before the icons, but to Adam Jora who was now hewing salt in the salt mines. But that marriage could no longer be performed. Ierofei beat her and did not speak to her for months on end. They treated her in the house like a stranger. Then the rumour that Adam had died spread through the village. Nobody knew who

had brought the news, but many said that they had heard it from a man who had spoken to someone who had been to the place where the salt mine was; and others knew it from someone, who in his turn knew a convict who had served his term and had been released. Uliana went about for months, perhaps for a year, trying to find that person who knew for certain. She wrote postcards but no answer came; then she learned to write petitions to the Tribunal, to the Mayor's Office, everywhere, but all in vain. Another winter went by. In the spring Uliana felt like singing and laughing. She was still sad, but she felt inclined to let her sadness lie deep in her heart and not inconvenience her for a time. Her friends tried to induce her to join in their dances and songs. Finally she allowed herself to be persuaded and went to them. She danced every Sunday and always with Simion Danilov. Others would have liked to dance with her, too, but were afraid of Simion and of his father's power. So Simion was always near her. He was a merry fellow, danced well, and told her he had loved her for many years and when would she take pity on him and marry him?

IX

It was Sunday morning. The sky was a pale blue with rolls of grey clouds along the horizon over the frozen salt-water lakes, and higher up over the sea. The fields were white and the roads towards Danilofca and the village streets were of brown, frozen mud with deep ruts cut by the cart wheels. At the bottom of the ruts shone thick ice reflecting the pale sky. And in the blue atmosphere rose the church towers with

their green, onion-shaped cupolas of copper that had gone rusty long ago. The bells rang out merrily, clearly, and the fishermen shod in thick, high boots of Russian leather went along the streets in groups. They wore red scarves around their necks and their caps at the back of their heads, while the younger lads went about with bare throats and unbuttoned shirts, all ruddy with the cold, laughing and joking in their thick voices as they crushed the snow and ice beneath their boots. The fishermen's wives came arm in arm, some of them with their mothers or daughters; the young women held each other round their waists and sang in chorus with high-pitched voices like silver bells or sometimes with shrill, metallic voices which jarred harshly upon your nerves and made your spine tingle, while others again had sweet, deep voices which thrilled you and went to your head without any apparent reason. The women did not look at the men; they walked towards the church — the older ones with their hands against their breast, with grey, black, or lilac-coloured kerchiefs tied over their heads, and wearing dark skirts and boots.

The bride and bridegroom came in Eftei Danilov's carts drawn by fat horses with straining necks and sleek hair — horses such as there were few in the village at the time in the possession of people who called themselves peasants. They were going at a trot and the men in the carts laughed and shouted. Eftei Danilov sat among them, frowning in his big grey beard like the Lord God Sabaoth; Simion, red in the face, was roaring out something, while his eyes were agleam for he had begun to drink in the morning. In the second cart Uliana sat with the women, stiff yet with flushed cheeks. Her thick auburn plaits were wound around her head like a crown and over them they had placed a white silk

shawl. With her bright cheeks and her dark eyes she looked straight before her without seeing anything.

In the smoke given off by the incense and candles in the church and in the strange light that filtered in through the tower windows, she became pale, but perhaps it was only the imagination of the people there that made her look pale. Many of them were neither glad nor sorry for her: they had come shrugging their shoulders — after all what was it to them? Eftei had money and his sons could marry whom they wanted. What business was it of theirs? But they looked at Uliana all the same, and thought whether she could not have acted otherwise. They knew Ierofei had thrashed her the night before. He had thrashed her, while her mother had gone on her knees to entreat her. And now Uliana stood as stiff as a poker, tall and slim and broad-shouldered, and pale with the flickering lights of the candles playing on her face. The old priest, a small, shrivelled fisherman with a white unkempt beard, and eyes sunk deep in their sockets like a corpse's, dressed in expensive church robes, went through the ceremony after the custom of the Christian Ortodox Church of the old rite, as the apostles had bequeathed to them, that had not been desecrated by a hypocritical clergy — the Church; the rite for whose sake the fishermen's ancestors had fled from the boyars' estates and from under the tsar's knout two hundred years before. When he asked Simion, God's servant, whether he would have this woman for his wife, Simion looked at her hesitatingly, almost fearfully, then plucked up courage and said as if with a chuckle:

"I will!"

The priest did not move an eyelid — he might have been dead; he might not even have heard. But he also asked Uliana, God's servant, if she would take the man

for her husband. At which Uliana, still unbending, looked at the priest with wondering eyes and did not say a word. A great silence suddenly fell upon the church. No one breathed. Ierofei, the destitute fisherman, pushed his daughter from behind. Uliana tottered: the old man had pushed her hard. She opened her mouth but at first the words would not come — they stuck in her throat. Then in a voice hardly audible she murmured:

"I will."

"*Ya vas blagoslovliayu!*" the priest said in a firm voice and made a great sign of the cross in the air which he seemed to throw at them; it was the movement of a fisherman raising his oar to strike his enemy. "*Ya vas blagoslovliayu!* My blessing upon you. You are man and wife."

At the same time in a remote little town at the foot of a mountain, convicts had been assembled in the former church of a former monastery which the rulers of the country had transformed into a prison over a hundred years ago. The church still had golden crosses on its towers; and the monastery had many iron doors with iron gratings, and a stale smell. The church was empty, without altar or icons, and the painting on the walls had grown grey and faint and could hardly be seen. It was a grey, cloudy winter morning here in the mountains. Through the tall, narrow windows of the big tower ashes seemed to be falling. The slabs on the floor seemed to be petrified ash. Even the convicts' clothes which were made of cheap cloth seemed to be covered with ash and most of the convicts' eyes were vacant, as if they were dead, though a dark flame seemed to burn in some of them. There were hundreds of them and they all knelt there with stooping shoulders. Of the shaven heads, as shining as grey steel balls,

some were bent in front of the preacher; others were raised to stare at him with dull eyes, or eyes burning with a smouldering fire. And the preacher stood at the place where the altar had formerly been and spoke aloud in the empty silence in the space beneath the cold vaults. He was dressed in civilian clothes, was lanky and unprepossessing, with clumsy movements. He belonged to the Baptist faith or was an Adventist or one of Christ's soldiers — it was not known exactly what he was, but now and again he would come to the prison governor and ask him to be allowed to preach; the governor let him preach. And now the man was shouting at the top of his voice:

"O ye faithless, ye men of sin! Eternal torture is in store for you unless ye repent. Strike your breasts in bitterness and tears, and gnash your teeth, for otherwise the unquenchable fire, boiling pitch and the demons' howls await you. Insure your souls! The Kingdom of Heaven is like an insurance company! If ye pray, repent and do God's will, ye are insured for eternal life! Your bodies die here but are born again in the afterworld, victorious. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a lottery where there are only winning tickets! All tickets win the big prize! Only a fool doesn't take a ticket!"

Whispers and stifled laughter came from a corner of the church. The warders who had listened with gaping mouths at the back, hurried to where the sounds came from and frowned at a group of convicts.

The convict Adam Jora, who was kneeling with bent head, raised his head slightly and looked their way from the corner of his eye. Some ten convicts were standing close to the cold wall. Some of them were young, and some of them grey-haired; some were short and some were tall. But they all had shaven pates and

hard, angular, bony faces, as if made of wood— the faces of men that had fed for years from the cauldron where convict food is prepared. Now they stood up and, because the guards were close upon them and looked at them with savage eyes, those among them who had whispered and laughed hid their smiles and appeared unconcerned: and of the rest some looked the preacher up and down, others regarded him with a far-away look or bored expression, while others stared at the walls and at the stone arches that curved high up above them in the ash-coloured light. One raised his hands — both hands for he was chained — and bit his nails. His movements caused his chains to clang; at which noise the preacher stopped for a moment, the warders gave a start and some of the kneeling convicts raised their shaven pates to look up. Seeing that the man was biting his nails with a bored, listless air, the preacher went on speaking and the warders frowned still harder — the convict seeming neither to notice nor to care, while the kneeling men fell back into their tired, corpse-like numbness.

The convict Jora, with lips that scarcely moved and in a voice not above a whisper spoke to the man next to him.

"What have they done?" he asked.

"They're Communists," the other whispered — "were brought here yesterday from Tîrgu-Ocna."

"Why don't they kneel?"

"They don't want to."

Adam again looked sideways, with an astonished, fearful, stealthy look at the standing convicts. And he kept his eyes on them for a few moments. Then an immense wrath and power surged within him. He felt he could have taken the whole church on his shoulders; and he wanted to get up and stand as they did. But he would not be allowed to, for if he

did, the guards would pounce on him and strike him. A fierce desire that possessed him altogether had taken hold of him. He wanted to rise all the same, just as sometimes he wanted to hold Uliana in his arms — Uliana who was waiting for him under the willows. Sometimes in the night he would groan and grind his teeth because he could not hold her in his arms — poor Uliana who was waiting for him down in the village. And now as strong a desire possessed him to stand up to his full length, to stand upright in the middle of the church with a stiff neck and clenched fists. But he suppressed the desire and remained as he was. He was breathing hard. From time to time fury took hold of him, but he struggled with it and overcame it. Then it began to rise within him in ever less powerful waves, and when he felt he had mastered it he suddenly realized that sweat was pouring down his body.

He did not hear the preacher, though the latter went on speaking. He twisted his neck to look from under his eyebrows stealthily at the standing convicts. An unconquerable power drew his eyes and his heart. He must speak to them as soon as possible and see what sort of people they were, what they wanted to do — and why they did not want to kneel.

It was just about the time when the convicts tramped through the prison yard on their return back from the sermon, that the wedding procession in the village of Danilofca started on its way.

Although it was wartime and poverty was rife, Eftei had been thriving; so he invited all his relations and neighbours and provided a rich wedding with much mirth, casks of wine and brandy, and a great deal of food and singing. For a day and a night before the wedding, the musicians walked the streets, playing upon

their instruments and accompanying them with voices heavy with drink and fatigue. The floor was still shaking under the boots of the young fellows, when Simion led Uliana into the room with its ornamental towels, paper flowers and wedding gifts, lifted her into the high bed and put out the light. He had drunk heavily, had wanted her for years now and it was dark, so that at the beginning he scarcely realized that Uliana was accepting his love silently, patiently, her teeth set, as one who might have been dead. When their marriage had been consummated he fondled her until late at night, then, tired and satisfied, he lay on his back. Uliana had hardly spoken, and neither sighed nor moved, when, just as Simion was ready to fall asleep, he heard her weep. Stretching out his hands, he felt Uliana lying face downwards, with her head hanging over the side of the bed and her shoulders shaking with her weeping. She wept aloud, painfully as if it hurt her to cry, sobbing and sighing.

In an instant all Simion's happiness vanished. He raised himself on his elbow and listened. He understood what kind of weeping that was, and a terrible hostility took possession of him. He began to shake her as one would shake a ragdoll, shouting:

"Stop crying!"

She went on sobbing and groaning in a distressing manner:

"Leave me alone! Only leave me alone!" she whispered.

For a few moments Simion was silent, turning things over in his mind.

"He's dead!" he exclaimed. "What else do you want?"

"Yes, but I am not dead," she stammered still sobbing.

"It were better you were dead, too," Simion mumbled sullenly.

Several months went by and everybody saw that Simion, that merry fellow who loved to sing and dance and never took life seriously, had grown sullen and querulous, and had taken to drink. And saw, too, that Uliana was growing more and more beautiful, though she was cold, unsmiling and ill-natured.

X

One day, in the autumn of 1944, when the sun shone coldly in a bleak, though cloudless sky, and the wind blew sharply over the desolate earth, a man was walking alone along a country road, somewhere in the north of Dobruja. He was tall, thin and bony; his cheeks were sunken and his eyes deep in their orbits; his clothes hung loosely upon him and looked like grey rags — an aspect assumed by clothes kept for many years under lock and key in a cupboard, and on which the fine, destructive dust, generated by time, had deposited.

He walked quickly, with big, tireless steps; and had any one seen him — but for the wind there wasn't a soul or thing the length and breadth of the deserted, arid steppe land that stretched out coldly this early autumn — had any one seen him, he might have detected in his eyes an impatient desire, a painful tension. He walked doggedly, butting against the boulders on the road and stepping into all its holes, for his eyes stared onward towards the remote horizon. There was nothing ahead of him but the highroad of yellow earth that dipped into a valley, then climbed over a flat-topped

hillock in the distance. But the wayfarer walked so quickly, and there was so much yearning in his eyes as he looked towards the low, barren mound, that he seemed to be expecting a vision to rise up in the distance, some miracle to happen, conjuring up a charmed image out of the earth. But when he finally got there, there was nothing but the barren fields overgrown with withered weeds and scattered with the droppings of the sheep, and the hawks that watched overhead, their wings stretched out motionless. However, the traveller walked on, the same impatient yearning in his eyes, looking ever onwards to where another valley could be seen and another hill. He continued to walk unconsciously over this hill, too, that he had looked at with so much yearning, yet without even noticing the places he was passing.

The man was Adam Jora, whose term of imprisonment had been reduced and who was now coming home.

And what he was always expecting to see from behind the remotest hill, he could only catch sight of late in the afternoon. The big boulders on the steppe all glowed to the west, casting long shadows to the east. Eastward, over the yellow slope of a hill, a green-gold light shone: the two onion-like cupolas of the Danilofca churches. Adam hastened his step, his heart beating high, although he was weak, hungry and dusty and his legs could hardly carry him. He traversed another valley and another hill, watching his immense shadow cast upon the road as he went. He reached the top of yet another hill. And beyond the valley were the hovels with smoke curling from their chimneys, and the first houses of Danilofca.

He entered the village at twilight, coming from the west, where the setting sun had streaked the sky

with dark-red bands that weighed on the soul. The villagers were not looking that way so they did not look at Adam either. He walked at a great pace, light-hearted, his mind in a kind of intoxication. He turned corner after corner of the village street as he walked along the tall fences. Then, having reached a place where he could see the greyish-green water, troubled and whipped by the wind as far as the horizon, and the wet sands of the beaches with the heavy, black fishing-boats drawn ashore, and the fishing-nets stretched out on the wooden pillars to dry, he proceeded along a narrow street and suddenly stopped. Children playing in that street were astonished to see a stranger looking at a broken, dilapidated fence and at a deserted courtyard, where silvery wormwood grew and plantain with fleshy leaves covered with dust, and where in the background was a little windowless cottage. The reed roofing had fallen through into the empty little rooms beneath, and nettles and weeds of every kind had sprung up. Withered leaves came out of the windows. The open door had rotted and hung crookedly upon its hinges.

The stranger stood with his hands resting on the fence, then entered the yard — not through the gaping hole in the fence, but through the gate with its rust-eaten hinges. He went into the house, stepping heedlessly upon the nettles. He looked first into one of the little rooms and then into the other. The red twilight came in through the broken roof. Weeds grew on the earthen floor; there was some repulsive dirt in a corner; beetles of the kind that live in damp, shady places ran along the flaking walls.

Adam sought to find at least one of the things he had known, but he found nothing. Stepping over the weeds he went out again and leaned against the

fence. The children were still playing in the street. He went over to them and, pointing to the house, asked hoarsely:

"Where's the old woman?"

They stopped their games, looking at him in astonishment, then at the arm that pointed towards the ramshackle cottage.

"What old woman?" asked one. "Old Acsinia?"

"Yes," he said chokingly. "Old Acsinia."

"She's dead," the children answered. "She died a long time ago. Her son died in jail. And she's dead too..."

Adam gave one more look at the house, then, without another word, went on along the village street.

He hardly knew what he felt; and maybe at that moment he did not feel anything. He might not have heard the news about his mother, not have seen the ramshackle cottage that was sinking into the ground. He hurried along the streets, over which the evening shadows were creeping, as if searching for something. He would go to Ierofei, Uliana's father, on the other side of the village, to ask about her, to see her and take her in his arms, to lift her from the ground like a child, though she was so tall and strong, and kiss her cheeks, her eyes, her forehead. A gentle, dizzying warmth filled his breast as he thought of their meeting.

He walked along a street that went directly through the village; and round the corner was Eftei Danilov's pub. To the right was the fence of Eftei's courtyard; to the left, across the street, a draw well. In the distance Adam had seen, though without paying attention to her, a woman come out of the gate that led to the well, draw water and fill her pail. All this he had seen without registering it; instead, in his mind's eye, he saw his

meeting with Uliana — the tall, slender, wild girl of sixteen, and not this woman with her pail full of water who was returning from the well with a heavy swaying movement of her hips.

But when he came face to face with her, he stopped, frozen stiff, bewildered. The woman with the pail was Uliana; it could be nobody else — and yet she was different.

When she saw him, she leant gently over to one side and placed her pail on the ground without taking her eyes from him. She had become as white as a sheet.

She was no longer the lithe, vigorous girl, with the narrow cheeks and daring, untamed look. Her face was full and rounded, of a rosy-white; her mouth softer and riper; and there was a defenceless gentleness in her eyes. She faced Adam — transfixed, happy and fearful at the same time, with all power of speech taken from her. She had placed one hand in the other in a way that looked helpless and appealing. Her lips moved slightly as if she were trying to speak, but no word came. Her eyes were bright and clear, and took on an unnatural glow as she looked at Adam. She was with child. She held her hands above her swelling body. She had another three or four months to go before delivery.

Adam saw and turned pale. His eyes slid from her face to her hands, then to her big, heavy womb. He seemed to have become stupid, haggard. He sought Uliana's eyes again, then glanced at the open gate. An old woman stood in the gateway and Adam recognized her: it was Eftei Danilov's wife, mother of Simion and Pricop. She watched them keenly and, when he turned towards her, she cried out in an ill-natured voice:

"Come along, daughter-in-law, leave your talk in the street!"

Uliana started and became still paler. She cast down her eyes, then raised them again towards Adam; and instead of guilt and shame, there shone in them the same unnatural glow and clarity. Adam could not stand it. He turned on his heels and began to walk away. But after a few steps, feeling that she still stood where he had left her, motionless, her eyes following him, he began to run.

Stammering out words that had no sequence and groaning aloud in his agony he ran, only slowing down when he was out of breath. He had long ago left the village behind and now walked along a road skirting the sea — still moaning, talking to himself and clenching his teeth in pain.

On and on he went, now striking himself with his fists and never ceasing to moan.

And where that strange fatigue overcame him he never knew, but he fell asleep on the ground by the roadside when the night was still young and lay for several hours as if dead. Then awaking suddenly he struggled wildly, and groaned in a stifled voice. He had dreamt that he saw Uliana in Simion's arms. But there was nothing except the dark plain, the starry sky, the tumultuous sea and the wind whistling through the darkness. He jumped to his feet, shuddering with disgust and despair and continued his way. He seemed to be running away from something; but whatever it was it could not be shaken off, because it was within himself.

Uliana had watched Adam until a waggon of hay coming from the end of the road had hidden him from her sight, feeling as she watched a fierce pain in her chest and womb: a shooting pain that lasted for a moment and then was gone.

Her mother-in-law, in the same shrill, unkindly voice, spoke to her again; but Uliana did not hear her. Her ears were tingling and her feet seemed to be sinking in thick layers of cotton wool as she walked. She moved as if in a dream, leaving the pail of water in the middle of the street and passing the old woman without seeing her. She crossed the courtyard and went into the new house that Eftei had built for his son Simion when he had married, leaving the door open. Going straight to their room, she sat on the bed, letting her hands lie idle in her lap, and remained staring at the wall, she herself knew not how long. She hardly breathed, only her eyelids closed of themselves now and then.

Throughout her pregnancy, Uliana had been gentle and patient. Formerly, when she had been surly and cold, she had struck fear into her mother-in-law. Lately, however, the old woman had recovered her sharpness, and continuously nagged and reproved her daughter-in-law. She had seen her go to the well and had wanted to know whether she would not stop and talk to the neighbours. She had observed the man come up to her, who, by the look of him, could only be Adam Jora, the convict. And now Uliana had passed her as if she had not seen or heard her.

In the evening, when Simion came back after a day's carting, sullen in his drunkenness, the old woman waited for him at the gate to tell him of the meeting. Simion refused to believe it, but the old woman swore to it and bade him ask the neighbours if it wasn't true that Adam Jora had returned in flesh and blood to meet Uliana at the well. When he had seen the mother-in-law, she added, he might have believed that the son was by too, and had taken to his heels fleeing like a thief.

Before she had done speaking, Simion rushed into the house, his face suffused with anger, his voice hoarse:

"Where are you?" he roared. "Where are you?" And without seeking an explanation, he took Uliana by the hair and dragged her from the bed, striking her on the head — one blow after the other. Then he knocked her down and, as she lay on the floor, kicked her with his boots.

The old woman in the yard expected to hear screams and cries but no sound reached her. Later, when Simion came out of the house, he had got over his drunkenness. He was trembling and spoke anxiously.

"Come," he said. "Come quickly !"

"What's the matter?" his mother asked him.

"I don't know, but come and see."

That night Uliana miscarried. She suffered greatly and for a few days was in danger of her life. Slowly, however, very slowly, she recovered.

Simion no longer touched her. He hated her, but he had had a great fright. He was afraid that he might kill her.

XI

In those days Pricop was a motor mechanic oiling the engines of the *Arabella Robertson* cargo-boat owned by a private company, with its command in the hands of a British skipper, and manned by a mixed crew of Swedes, Spaniards, Maltese, three Rumanians and a couple of Negroes. The ship was sailing under the flag of the Republic of Panama, the laws of the said Republic giving no guarantee to the crew, but being distinctly favourable to the interests of the shipowner — a fact

which induced many shipowners to pay large sums to be able to fly the Panama flag at its mast.

One evening, as the boat was making its way almost dead slow between the buoys of the Maracaibo Lagoon, Pricop came out upon deck feeling as though he was stifling down below, his very flesh melting upon him. Streaming with perspiration, dressed only in shorts, with his chest bare and smeared with black oil, thin, sinewy, athletic, with close-cropped hair, straight, firm temples, smooth cheeks just as firm, and cold eyes, he now stood at the top of the iron stairway that came from the glowing precipice with its steam and smell of oil and where the huge bronze pistons moved in a reddish light. At the top of the iron stairway he waited hoping to feel a cool breath come to him from the sea, but none came. Another two steps upon the upper deck brought him to the rails where, resting his elbows, he gave himself up to thought. Below, the sea dashed against the ship's side with a mysterious swash, and the monotonous sound of running water came from the pump's outflow into the sea. A little way off the water was a shiny black — a dark forest came down to its edge, and it seemed so close, that you thought you could touch the trees with your hand, though Pricop could only see the great masses of foliage — a darker patch than the darkness of the night. What land were they coasting? The Venezuelian coast? An island? Seen through the film of vapour — the light, warm mist that descended upon the ship — the starry sky overhead seemed very far away. Pricop's breath came in short, quick gasps as if he had not enough air to breathe. And how could he have enough when nothing in the ether moved and the ship only crept along. Three decks above Pricop, in the signal room where only the bulb of the compass burnt, the pilot,

a fat, sweating Mulatto, with a cigarette under his little black moustache, was piloting the ship along its navigable course. Very faint red, green, and white dots pierced the light mist that covered the sea. Some hundred yards away to the starboard the thick, black trees, that seemed to intertwine, towered above the ship, rising as high as the masts; and with it all there was unimaginable silence. This Pricop was aware of — although his thoughts were really far away — as he was aware of the vibration of the vessel and the trepidation that went through her, the smothered sound and the swishing of steam that came up from the engines below, withal all else was dead, motionless, soundless, and the *Arabella Robertson*, as in a dream, was flying through the air, and the air was filled with signalling lights lost in the mist beneath the stars above.

Suddenly, the howl of a wild beast was heard from the forest — a fearful blood-curdling sound, a fiendish howl of hunger, spite, fury and ferocity, that caused Pricop to retreat from the rails. And then silence fell again, as if all that had passed had been dreamt — a dream overlapping for a moment the other dream of floating through the warm mist. And now again this silence ! From the crew's quarters at the prow where the men lay naked, with sweat streaming down their bodies, smoking and playing cards, came the thin tremulous strains of a guitar.

Pricop spat the end of the cigarette he had been smoking into the oily sea below, and turned as somebody came down the narrow stairway that descended from the bridge deck above, whistling like a bird: "phew, phew, phew, phee ! phee ! phee !" The fellow was a fat, bald, grey individual wearing ducks, with a thick nose, a full drooping lower lip that twisted in an expression

of the cynicism of a man who had seen much, learnt much and disliked the whole show. It was the ship's engineer, the second of the three Rumanians on board. He came up to Pricop and leaned against the rails. A streak of sweat ran down his cheek from his greying temples.

The *Arabella Robertson* crawled slowly along the rampart of forest darkness. Sweet, pungent odours were wafted through the dark warm air. The stars overhead twinkled faintly through the mist.

Again the roar of a wild beast broke the silence of the night. The ship's engineer gave a start and swore:

"Hell! How that startled me! Did you hear it? What the devil can it be? A jaguar?"

Pricop did not answer. He laughed a wide laugh that showed his teeth at seeing the engineer's fright; and the latter asked him sharply, with an unpleasant twist of his mouth:

"What are you laughing at, my boy? Do you find me funny? To hell with you!"

"You looked so — scared," Pricop said.

Beneath them an eerie voice, which seemed to come from the sea, rose in a whining, dismal call. The two leant over the rails. A slender, narrow, pointed boat had sped like an arrow to within a few yards of the ship's side — a black arrow carrying three black shapes — three men, two of which were paddling each with a paddle, while the third stood to produce his call. Pricop heard the ship's engineer answering — in Spanish as far as he could make out — though the men in the boat did not seem to be using that language; they spoke a language unknown to Pricop; or was it that Spanish sounded like that in their throats, acquiring a strange quality from the immense forest which rose above the masts of the *Arabella Robertson.*

The strange voice on the sea addressed the engineer in whining, wailing tones, so low as to be almost a whisper.

"What do they want, Mr. Hell?" Pricop asked.

People had forgotten the real name of the ship's engineer, for everybody called him Mr. Hell on account of his favourite swearword, and this on all ships and for many years. The old man did not answer; he turned on the reflector that had been fitted in the larboard corner of the cabin deck at the prow, at the top of the steps leading to the bridge deck. And suddenly the boat was fully illuminated on the green, dead-looking waters that seemed more like a swamp than the sea; it was a brown-black boat with three brown-black men in it, with straw hats and ragged shirts, and skinny arms without any muscle. The man who was standing seemed to be waiting for something. The ship's engineer went into his cabin, and hurriedly returned with a paper that he crumpled in his hand and threw as far as he could out to sea. With one swift movement the men paddled the boat towards the crumpled paper, and the third man bent and stretched over the side a thin arm with a big, long, whitish swelling on the hand. Seizing the paper, he unfolded it, drew out another paper and, looking up in the blinding light of the reflector, took off his hat and said:

"Gracias! Muchas gracias!"

Pricop saw a mouth with cracked and swollen lips and a face disfigured by white spots and swellings similar to that on the hand; then, suddenly, Mr. Hell turned off the reflector and everything disappeared in the darkness.

"What did you give them?" Pricop asked.

"A dollar... They wanted to sell us something, but they're in a bad way, poor miserable devils!...

What's one to buy from them, tell me? They sell fruit, fowls and eggs; which to bring on board means bringing disease that not even the devil could cure. But they're happy now, the god-forsaken wretches! They go back home through the swamps! The forest rises from the water, has its roots in the water — and they must get home through it, that is, if those foul beasts, the jaguars, don't get them first..."

The *Arabella Robertson* was creeping along almost noiselessly in the warm darkness. In the signal room above, the Mulatto pilot, with his cigarette sticking in the corner of his mouth, slowly turned the wheel. In the crew's space, the sailors vainly tried to sleep, their bare bodies glistening wet.

Pricop and the chief engineer lingered long at the ship's side, their elbows resting on the rails, and in silence. Finally Pricop murmured:

"What's to be done, Mr. Hell?"

"About what?"

"About...this devil of a job of ours."

"What d'you mean by that, man?"

"Well, don't you see what beggars we are? I'm damned if I can go on like this, Mr. Hell. I'm sick and tired of it."

"But what d'you want? Is it money?" the old man asked with a sceptical smile.

Pricop did not answer.

"Women, then?"

Pricop was still silent.

"Or is it that you want to be a big'un?"

Pricop spoke between his teeth:

"Yes, I want money, women, everything! Didn't you see the chap from the company, the one who came on board at Punta Arenas? With the hat on, a cigar in

his mouth and his hands in his pockets like a pasha! While we looked... the paupers we are..."

"Phew, phew, phee!" the old man chirped, somewhat cheered. "So you want to be a shipowner, Pricop lad? But you want capital for that, my poppet...Are you a capitalist, by any chance?"

Pricop swore lustily at the capitalists and capital.

"You'd have made a good pirate in the old days, Pricop. Now...there's nothing for it but to work for your living. Take it from me, you weren't born with a silver spoon in your mouth, so it looks as if you'll have to do without those things!"

"Better not to have been born at all," Pricop snarled, "than live like this..."

The old man looked him over carefully and murmured:

"Now watch your step, Pricop, my lad, and see you don't do anything silly..."

And whistling lightly, like a bird in the tree, he left his companion, going to the other side of the cabin deck, where he knocked at a door.

"Who's there? Come in!" a voice from within said in English.

The ship's engineer entered...In the cabin which smelt of soap and eau-de-Cologne, a tall, slender, dark-haired fellow in pants and a vest was arranging a pile of white shirts on the bed. Women's photos in all sizes, some of them showing their face near that of the owner of the cabin, Spiru Vasiliu, mate on the *Arabella Robertson*, were pinned on the cabin walls.

"What is it, old man?" he said in a pleasant baritone voice, smiling at Mr. Hell with his white teeth that always drew the women's attention and kept it

away from the thin hair that came over the beginning of a bald patch.

"Have a cigar...and a whisky and soda."

From a little locker he took out a bottle and glasses, his hairy hands — he boasted of a hairy body — bedecked with a gold wrist-watch and its gold bracelet, as well as a heavy gold ring.

"Listen here, Spiru...but what are you doing? Putting your linen in order?"

"Getting ready for the dames in Caracas," the other said with a laugh.

"You'll get a tropical syphilis and no joke," the old man said.

"Oh ! We live but once," Spiru Vasiliu said with a shrug. "So why not enjoy ourselves?"

"What do you care? That's your way of looking at things..." the old man murmured thinking of Pricop.

"One in every port !" Spiru Vasiliu laughed with a glance at the photos on the wall.

The fearful roar of a wild beast was heard again. The old man listened intently till silence fell. He said:

"You know, Spiru, this Pricop... the Lipovan in the engine room...When you want to do some business, he's the man to work with, d'you hear? He's the man. He's like those tom-cats that howl outside."

Spiru Vasiliu shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm not interested in doing business. Women are more in my line."

The old man wiped the sweat that trickled into his eyes with the back of his hand.

"What? D'you want to say there's something in life worth more than the women?" Spiru Vasiliu asked.

The ship's engineer let his lower lip fall in disgust.

"Nothing's worth anything... nothing."

"You're old and finished. That's why you say that," Spiru Vasiliu said.

"Yes, it's just because I'm old and have tried my hand at many things that I know a bit, that I speak as I do," the engineer retorted. "Nothing's worth the effort we make for it. Everything's rotten, Spiru. Where's that soda water? And why not call for some from the ice?"

✦

The summer was nearing its end. The *Arabella Robertson* was at Malta with a cargo of machines for Alexandria. At Malta she had to take in tubes and pipes also for Egypt and the loading was being done at night. Pricop Danilov was returning to the ship from town.

No wind was blowing, not a breath of air was felt; a dry intensive heat that excited the nerves weighed over La Valetta. If you touched the old stone walls they were burning hot. A smell of putrid things issued from the gaping cellars. The houses along the streets through which Pricop walked at such a swift pace were lighted — there was light showing in nearly all the windows, between the laths of the shutters and from beneath the blinds. A woman in a dressing gown called to Pricop from a gateway: "*Eh, tu, vieni qua!*"

Pricop threw a fugitive glance at her. The woman laughed at him with her thick, painted lips parted, showing her big teeth one of which was missing; her uncombed hair flowed loose on her shoulders, while her stupid, vulgar laughter, her unfastened dressing-gown that disclosed her hanging breasts, and her black stockings showed that she was one of the cheap prostitutes for wretched sailors with small pay. Pricop gave no heed to her, but quickened his step. He had just run out of such a house, had turned one corner after another

and was now descending towards the port, without noticing anything: neither the houses with their big coats of arms hewn in the stone above the doors, where knights, commanders and masters of the Order had formerly lived, nor the shining shop signs, nor the drunken English soldiers and seamen who walked in the middle of the street, six abreast, singing out of tune and compelling the civilians to get off the pavement. Nor did he look with any interest at the restaurants and variety theatres which the more expensive women for the rich frequented — women above Pricop's means. He gave no heed to anything; he was thinking with strained intensity. He simply had to speak to Old Hell, to talk things over with him; if necessary, to bribe him.

He was not sorry for what he had done. It had been an impulse. He didn't for a moment regret it. He only regretted not having thought beforehand how to keep himself out of trouble.

In a state of sharp awareness, his strained nerves enabling him to see everything with unusual clarity as if in a powerful light, Pricop arrived at port. Here, under the immense walls heated by the day's sunshine, below the towers, ramparts and bastions of the old fortress of the knights, the cranes creaked and rumbled, hammers struck upon iron and a siren gave a gruff reminder to the cargo-boats made fast at the quay side, where the oily water shone in rainbow colours of red, violet and dark-blue in the light of the reflectors; farther away on the dark waters where a picket-boat with a big flag trailing in the water in the stern described a track, three battleships of the British Mediterranean Fleet rode at anchor — low, broad grey ships like tortoises, heavy with their conning-towers, turrets and long, sleek guns. But Pricop had eyes only for his own boat which he had

to reach — the ancient *Arabella Robertson*, moored at the quay, a grey thing, with the bridge deck painted an ugly brown, and a long slender funnel betraying her advanced age. Pricop boarded her unobtrusively and went in search of the ship's engineer.

The next morning, with her crew and cargo on board, the *Arabella Robertson* was sailing leisurely in the roadstead of La Valetta, when a picket-boat of the port authorities, her prow churning the water into thick foam, sped by the tug-boat towing the *Arabella* out of port and called upon the boat through a loudspeaker to slow down, the picket-boat almost immediately coming alongside the *Arabella*. The skipper of the *Arabella* — a thin, grey-haired Englishman with a grey complexion and glassy eyes, as wrinkled as a mummy, and with a pipe between his teeth — ordered Spiru Vasiliu to see what was the matter. Wincing under the strong smell of spirits that pervaded the air about the skipper, Spiru Vasiliu went to greet the guests. Two men — a civilian and an officer of the port authorities — had climbed the rope ladder and were already on the upper deck. A sailor washing the deck, accidentally turned the hose upon them, soaking them pretty thoroughly, while the other two sailors looked on with very solemn faces. Wet and angry, the civilian and the officer did not answer Spiru Vasiliu's salute. The latter had a serious mien although he knew that the play with the hose had not been accidental. The two men told him curtly that the crew had to be lined up on deck since a Rumanian sailor was wanted for murder: a Danish sailor had been killed the preceding night in a brothel where they had received the information that the criminal was a Rumanian sailor. And it was known that the *Arabella* had three Rumanians on board — two officers and a seaman.

The two reviewed the crew lined up on deck. As Spiru Vasiliu, pale after a hectic night, walked behind the plain-clothes officer and the officer of the port authorities, he could hardly control his laughter at the sight of the crew under scrutiny: a black eye here and there, bruised faces generally, a man with a bandaged head, another, a Maltese, with a mop of hair in confusion, and all of them with trousers hanging below their waists or with torn vests showing tattooed mermaids, hearts and anchors. Among them Pricop, clean-shaven, his hair closely cropped and neatly dressed, looked the most decent man of the lot. The police officer and the port officer both turned in disgust towards Spiru Vasiliu. The port official asked:

"What's the matter with your crew? Have they been rioting? Are they still drunk? A fine crew, indeed !"

A rasping voice was heard from behind them:

"My crew's all right. What d'you want?"

It was the skipper. The two men turned round and saluted him somewhat disdainfully, the smell of gin emanating from him not being entirely to their liking. He led them into the wardroom, summoned the officers on board, and within a quarter of an hour everything had been cleared up. The wanted man could only be one Pricop Danilov — sailor. But, according to the chief engineer's statement, the man in question had played backgammon with him the whole night. Spiru Vasiliu, the mate, gave information to the effect that he had left Pricop on board, and on his return an hour later had found him still there. They summoned Pricop. Standing in the doorway of the wardroom, thin and sinewy, his bony face expressionless, the muscles of his chest showing through his tight vest, looking them straight in the face, Pricop Danilov said that he had not been in

town. The plain-clothes policeman looked at the skipper that smelt so strongly of spirits, at the smart mate with his impertinent smile, at the chief engineer, half-naked, with white hair on his stomach seen above his khaki shorts, at the other officers in much the same state of undress and shrugged:

"Draw up some statement and sign it," he said. After all the Danish seaman had no business to fight a member of this gang mistakenly called a crew, which he, a policeman, would have jailed on the evidence of their physiognomy.

So the *Arabella Robertson* sailed out of the port of La Valetta, the smoke from her funnel trailing over the blue waters of the Mediterranean. It was then that the unbreakable link between Pricop Danilov, Old Hell and Captain Vasiliu was forged, which lasted for as long as the three sailed on the *Arabella Robertson*, continuing even after she had been wrecked and Pricop, Spiru and the old man sailed on Rumanian ships. Nobody knew that the three were linked by this secret, and by others as well.

In this time, among other dockers with their trousers rolled up and their loins girt with a broad woollen belt, one might have seen a tall, broad-shouldered fellow with an unsmiling face and unhappy eyes on the wharves of the port of Constantza near the freight-ships, from the cabins of which, or from the bridge deck above, foreign sailors, a pipe between their teeth and dressed in strange attire, looked down. Like the other dockers, he wore an apron of sack cloth and a cap made from half a cement-bag. He was a decent, silent fellow, working harder than the others — who liked him; they found but one fault with him, which was that he never laughed. When they got drunk and made a night of it

with the women, Adam Jora also got drunk and was one of their crowd, but the next day he spoke to no one, and if any of the more talkative raised some argument with him, he would go for him till he was black and blue. That had happened once or twice, which taught them to leave him alone.

There was a place though where Adam spoke a little more than his usual three or four words, and that was at the trade-union branch. He hadn't had much schooling, but he had an unfailing sense of what was right and wrong and gave his opinion openly as to what seemed to him right or wrong. In 1946 he was on the dockers' trade-union committee.

He had not heard of the Danilovs, nor they of him and, had they met, all three would have been astonished at the changes they had lived through, when chance decided they should meet again.

XII

One afternoon, in the spring of 1950, when streaks of purple cloud high up at what seemed a dizzy height stretched across the sky — a sky that had turned a clear, lemon colour in the light of the setting sun — Simion stood on the threshold of his house, sullen as usual, a sack in one hand and a pair of heavy boots in the other. He stood looking about him frowning as if he had forgotten something.

He was a man of thirty odd years now, but looked older on account of the permanent discontent that overshadowed his face. He had not shaved for several days and was dressed shabbily in a suit of old clothes, stained in many places and out at the elbows and knees.

On his head he wore a grimy cap. He stood there and looked about him. The courtyard was deserted except for old Eftei Danilov who was bent over a log, chopping wood.

The old man had grown grey since the Workers' and Peasants' State had taken his pubs from him, one to turn into a House of Culture and the other into the headquarters of the village Party organization, had deprived him of his power, and weighed him down with taxes and quotas of grain, wine, meat and butter, and had, moreover, sent him to jail for a year for sabotage. It had all come suddenly like a storm in 1948—1949 and early in 1950, and had turned him into a different man. He had grown thin, the back of his neck had narrowed, his beard was nearly white, his cheeks sunken and his arms had lost flesh. He seemed a helpless old man as he chopped firewood, and not the great Eftei Danilov of former days: fat, frowning Eftei, with a head as if carved in stone, a bushy beard and a great bass voice.

Simion despised him now, and behaved decently towards him only because he knew that somewhere he had gold hidden, although he denied it with a desperate, senseless obstinacy, even when there was nobody by to hear him. "I've got nothing, nothing, I tell you," the old man complained in what seemed heart-rending sorrow. But he did have some still and Simion knew of it and that was why he provided for him.

"Have you done?" Simion asked looking over his shoulder. But the old man did not even look up. He was getting more and more deaf these days. Uliana came out of the house with a bag in her hand, holding it out to Simion without looking at him. Not that she particularly avoided looking at him: she simply didn't

see him. She might just as well have hung up the bag on a peg. Simion took the bag from her and asked, also without looking at her:

"Did you put in the bottle?"

"Yes," Uliana murmured.

"Good," Simion said. He lingered for a moment, then with an air of determination went away without another word, kicking the gate to. He had not said 'I'm going,' and if he had, Uliana would hardly have wished him 'a pleasant journey.' Formerly he used to take leave of her, but Uliana had never answered his leave-taking and he understood she was right. What was there between them? They were strangers. No word passed between them except what was absolutely necessary, not one word. In the summer they did not even sleep together: Simion slept in the barn or under a hayrick. But when it was cold as now, they shared the same bed, Uliana drawing close to the wall and as far from him as she could. When he came home the worse for drink, he sometimes desired her. He would draw her roughly by the shoulder towards him, Uliana letting him do as he pleased, but remaining cold and lifeless and afterwards withdrawing to the wall again without a word. Now, without even hearing the gate close, she went behind the house and rested her elbows on the wooden fence that had turned grey with age, and looked listlessly over the smooth waters that were as yellow as the evening sky. There was a smell of stagnant water and of fresh leaves; of the gluey buds of the willows, the freshly upturned earth; the new grass and the cold breeze, all of which sent a tremor through Uliana. She was strong and healthy and so alone, so alone! There was no work for her in the house, so she remained looking over the desolate waters.

Eftei Danilov continued his wood-chopping when presently the old woman called out hoarsely from the house:

"Haven't you done yet?"

Eftei did not answer. Yes, that's how it was: once you were a big pot, rich and powerful, with houses of your own, children, relations, friends, a fortune and plenty of business to do. And suddenly, one never knew exactly how, nothing was left of it all, and you were weak and exhausted and pottered about doing petty jobs...

"Eftei, go and see what all the row's about outside."

The old man stuck his axe in the log, straightened himself and, his knees creaking, went dutifully to the fence to see what was happening in the street. He remained there for a long time looking at the people outside. They took no notice of him at all; nor did they care about him or heed him. As far as they were concerned he might die any day. Oh! how he would like to crush them; but not even his anger was what it had been: somehow it couldn't find sure and efficient ways of venting itself; it was the hesitating, ill-natured anger of an impotent old man.

Heavy trucks had stopped in the street and, in their short padded jackets and rubber boots or dressed in their usual clothes, all stained with tar and the blood of fish, and shod with boots of Russia leather, the fishermen were issuing from their houses and from the neighbouring streets calling to each other at the top of their voices:

"Cosma! Nicolae! Come on!"

And, their bags flung across their shoulders, broad-backed, slim-waisted men came; bearded men and clean-shaven, and fair-haired young fellows with strong shoul-

ders — people who formerly went out fishing in the boats of Eftei and of Foma Carp and the others. They were not so boisterous in those days; now they called out loudly and laughed — no longer muzzled.

'The noisiest is Emelian Romanov who used to work for me in the old days, like his father who was drowned. He nearly bursts with self-importance!' old Eftei was thinking.

Emelian had grown older, his hair was grey like a wolf's, his cap pushed far back, almost on the nape of his neck. He talked a great deal; his nose was always turned up insolently, and his eyes were like steel. He took bearded Iermolai by the hand calling out his name:

"Iermolai!"

Out there in the street Emelian Romanov was indeed shouting more loudly than seemed necessary, but he had to make himself heard:

"Iermolai!"

The man he addressed was of such strong build that he seemed broader than he was tall. Red of face, he had small, merry blue eyes, and was laughing.

"What is it, me lad?"

"Iermolai, you stink of fish!"

"Me?" Iermolai said in surprise. "Impossible! Just your fancy... Your nose hasn't got it..."

They had all gathered about him.

"Or perhaps of cheese, Iermolai!"

"That's more like it... I did have a little..."

"And what else with your cheese, Iermolai?"

Iermolai suddenly flared up without any obvious cause:

"Leave me alone, fellow! Is it a joke you're after, now?"

"What did you take with your cheese, Iermolai?"

Those around were laughing. Iermolai turned his head to one side and mumbled:

"Oh, well... just a wee drop of brandy..."

"But it don't smell as if it was only a wee drop, it's like it were a bucketful!"roared Emelian Romanov, the eldest son of the Romanov who was drowned in the old days. They all laughed, while in the middle of the group, looking a bit ashamed, Iermolai smiled at them, his red nose and cheeks making three fiery patches, and his eyes looking like two bits of ice above his big, bushy beard.

"O well, a kind-hearted man like me comes to no harm when he drinks a wee drop..."

"Yes, but you're too kind-hearted, Iermolai! And drink too many wee drops!"

"Well, that's how I am, a kind-hearted man," Iermolai said. And with his heavy hand he struck his chest which sounded like a wall:

"It's here, in my heart, that I hold you all! That's how I am! You're all in my heart!"

And struggling to get hold of them he began to kiss them all in turn, while Emelian told his story:

"Brothers, d'you think Iermolai would come in the lorry with us today? No! He got into the bus and sat there, his hands on his knees, his head up like a king, and off he went. 'Your ticket, Comrade,' the conductor asked. 'Ticket?' Iermolai said. 'What ticket? Aha, the ticket...' "

Iermolai had ceased administering kisses and was now listening like the rest. Emelian pulled his cap over his forehead and continued:

"'Aha, the ticket. And how much may it be to Constantza?' He was told the fare; Iermolai made a sign with his finger. 'But, I'm not going to pay that,'

he said. 'What d'you mean you're not going to pay that?' 'Just what I say! Fifty per cent reduction for me, because I'm a high sea fisherman!' "

The men roared, holding their sides: to think that Iermolai could do such a thing! The latter however argued quite seriously:

"And isn't that as it should be? Don't I risk my life for the fish that others eat? And he wanted me to pay the full price of the ticket! Well, I swore at him and got off the bus..."

At this juncture several men joined them who had come briskly from the other end of the street.

"Come on, fellows," Emelian shouted, "the limousine's waiting for you. Come on, Mihail, but go steady or you'll lose your pants!"

And without more ado, Emelian Romanov got into the lorry with an astonishing sprightliness for so heavy and brawny a man. The others, hustling one another, and treading on each other's feet for fun, climbed into the lorries, Iermolai hauling in a big red, padded quilt which had been rolled and tied up. Simion Danilov kept apart from the fun, occasionally laughing at some joke but mostly frowning. He was among the first to get into the lorry. The old man had waited to see whether his son would not cast a glance towards the house. But no: Simion had already started on some deep-toned song in which the others were joining. The first lorry set off, then the second and the third and soon they had all vanished in the heavy dust which the setting sun touched with gold.

Old Eftei spat in disgust, leaving some of his expectoration sticking to his beard. He went back towards the house, from where the old woman shouted at him:

"Come on, there! What on earth have you been doing all this time? You might be dead for all the good you do!"

'If only she would stop talking about my being dead,' Eftei thought with impotent despair. It made him feel like taking an axe and splitting her head.

"I'm coming," he called back submissively. "I'm coming."

"Well, and what was the noise about?"

"Only the fishermen leaving; and Simion with them."

XIII

The light of powerful electric bulbs and search-lights blazed all over the port, penetrating the columns of smoke that dispersed in the black atmosphere around. Flags fluttered gently. The *Dzherzhinsky* of Odessa, a twelve-thousand ton vessel, was loading at the poop and unloading at the prow, all her cranes working to capacity. On their trailers, tractors were bringing to the wharves great cases for the *Almirante Brown* of Costa-Rica which was leaning heavily to one side; while on the upper deck of a dirty, grey Turkish sailing caique, sailors were cooking at a tin stove. The *Blue Star* of London, a black unwieldy giant with rusty flanks, was giving a husky, prolonged whistle, signalling for the pilot, wanting to put out to sea. The cranes of the *Oceano* of Genoa, coming from China, creaked noisily, the iron sheets of her planking all stained with rust. The *Apsheron* of Odessa stood motionless in her white elegance by the oil-wharf, her deck clear, her oil-pumps working automatically, invisibly, as if of their own

accord. The *Sagoland* of Goeteborg, white like the ships one sees in one's dreams, spread a fearful stench of rottenness and infectious plague from her cargo of several thousand tons of raw hide from Buenos Aires. Tractors rumbled along the wharves, the dockers bore sacks upon their shoulders, cases swung in the air, the silos permeated the air with their specific smell of grain and mice as they had done for scores of years and the water in the port took on a silky, metallic gloss from the light of the reflectors shining upon its surface stained by crude oil, motor oil and fuel oil. Sometimes it had a purple, rosy or reddish sheen. All kinds of rubbish — cabbages, a discarded broom, newspapers — were being washed up gently against the sides of the old, greyish vessels, with their long and narrow funnels — vessels which had sailed the seas since 1900 or even before, had been commanded by many captains, had known many crews, every sea, numberless storms and the strangest freights.

One of these, formerly a freighter, was the *October Star* now belonging to the fishing fleet. She had been freshly painted, and on her funnel, which formerly bore the initials or colours of certain shipping companies, long ago wound up, a yellow sturgeon was now painted on a blue background. The *October Star* belched out her black smoke and her throb was felt at the very top of the highest mast. On the foredeck was much bustle and noise, steam winches rumbled and tugged at their cables and cases were being hauled up and swayed in the air over the deck.

The winch to the starboard revolved noisily, spitting out steam, and a case which should have descended smoothly into the open hold, fell beside it and broke, letting out hundreds of onions which rolled all over the

deck. An indignant cry was heard from the bridge deck.

"Well, I'll be — just look at that! Secure the winch!"

After which a tousled head appeared from above, and the same voice shouted:

"Where's the second mate? Mate!"

"Here, Comrade!"

"Comrade Constantin! See to that winch! And you, there, clear the deck of those onions! That's all you are good for. Christ! What a crew on this ramshackle carcass of a boat! Play-boy sailors! And you call yourself a winch-operator, do you? What if there'd been a machine in that case, or mirrors, or watches? God! that I should ever have become a seaman!"

The head disappeared somewhere at the third floor of the white-painted iron and timber structure high up in the signal room.

On the deck the misdemeanant began gathering up the onions and put them in what was left of the case. He was highly offended and protested vehemently.

"Was it my fault? Why, in former days... just a case! Nobody but me'll put it together again... talking to me like that!"

The second mate was now handling the winch, occasionally casting a glance at the other winch-operator who had not spoken as yet. The latter was a thin, dried-up sort of fellow with a sunken chest and a long neck; his head was too small for his size and so was his chin; a lighted cigarette was stuck in the corner of his mouth which twisted his face into a grimace. He remained perfectly impassive going on with his work as if he had neither seen nor heard anything, his eyes puckered up to keep the smoke of his cigarette out of them. But

the second mate was wondering what would be the outcome of the scene he had just witnessed and was a trifle dismayed:

'After all, what could happen? The officer had been right in his reprimand. A winch-operator has to do his job!' However, the silence and indifference of Preţiosu, the winch-operator next to him, boded no good. Still, Comrade Nicolau had done right; if the mate didn't keep his eyes skinned, what would happen to the ship? And why should this young fellow kick up such a shindy?

He was indignant at the grumbling of the fellow at fault. "The devil take this job of mine..." he began speaking without addressing anyone in particular but obviously to be overheard by Preţiosu, who went on smoking with unconcern. "Things on board this ship seem to be as in the old days." The second mate was a quiet, shy fellow, and needed all his courage to speak in the tone he did:

"Listen here, Lae! You just keep quiet and take more care another time. First you break the case and then start kicking up a row!"

The young fellow Lae was surprised and looked at Preţiosu, not at the second mate, to see what he would say. The former, however, continued to show indifference to the whole affair, so Lae kept silent. He had long, curly hair with side whiskers close to his ears and a little moustache; one of his arms was tattooed with an anchor, the other with a mermaid. He went on gathering up his onions, whistling unconcernedly.

From the wharf, the director of the fishing fleet had watched the scene on board the *October Star*. He turned towards Captain Haralamb, the commander of the vessel. Captain Haralamb said, his small blue eyes expressionless:

"On any ship in the world, the helmsman would have come to see to the winch."

"And why didn't your helmsman do so?" the director asked.

"He's at a meeting with Comrade Pricop Danilov," the captain said, not taking his eyes from the director's face — a trade-union meeting."

The director — a man still young, with a big nose and intelligent black eyes — had also been a sailor in the past. His civilian clothes did not give him away, but an anchor could be seen tattooed on the back of his hand. He turned without answering towards a group of tired, nervous clerks, who waited a few steps away.

"Where are the drivers?"

"Here, comrade director."

The drivers of the lorries which had left Danilofca in the evening came up. They were dusty and tired like the others, and smoked in silence.

"Why didn't you bring the fishermen straight to the port?"

"When I stopped at the gate for militia control, they jumped off, comrade director," one of the drivers answered. "They said they'd have a glass of beer and be back at once."

"Did they, indeed! And beer too!" the director jeered. Two wrinkles which grew deeper as his disgust became more evident cut across his face near his mouth.

"Who else saw them drinking their beer?" the director asked. "Comrade Vasiliu!"

At that moment a tall, slim fellow came up; he must have been handsome years ago, and his regular features, his shining white teeth, that he disclosed when he laughed, still testified to it; now, however, there were pouches under his eyes, he was too thin, and it struck one that

he must be leading a hard life with insufficient food and sleep.

"I don't see any cause for amusement," the director said sternly.

Comrade Vasiliu, who all his life had used his smile and display of his fine teeth to advantage, pleasing the women and even mollifying the shipping agents and the brokers in all the ports of the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, suddenly took on a look of solemnity.

"You might be amused," the director went on, "but the fleet cannot put out to sea because of the fishermen's indiscipline. Well, you shall answer for the men! Did you go to meet them at the gate? No! Then go and collect them now!"

Serenely, as if he had not heard the reproof, Vasiliu said:

"I'll be back with them within an hour..."

"Within an hour? Why not tomorrow?"

This time Vasiliu did not answer. He merely turned on his heels and vanished in the shadows of the scaffolding and metal tubes by which grain was unloaded from the silos. The director turned towards Captain Haralamb and murmured:

"A fine mate he must've made if he can't keep a few score of men in hand!"

Haralamb laughed as he shrugged his shoulders:

"You have no idea what a ship his was...a floating bedlam...and a pub and gaming house...floating too..."

"So I heard...it was spoken about pretty widely but this is not the *Arabella*," the director answered with some asperity. "Why don't you strenghten the discipline on board?" he suddenly asked, no longer thinking of Vasiliu and the ship he had sailed. "Why

should there be less discipline in the fishing fleet than in the merchant service? You and the officers are answerable for it!"

The captain had taken his eyes away from him and was now looking at the dark, oily water in the port. The *Blue Star* of London moved slowly, casting its shadow on the brightly lit building of the Maritime Station. Haralamb closed his mouth and was silent.

"Ask the Party organization for support," the director continued. "Ask the support of the trade union! Why don't you do that? Don't you trust them? You want the Party to take two steps towards you without your taking a step to meet the Party?"

The captain appeared dejected and embarrassed. He did not answer.

"Why don't you talk with some of us more?" the director asked again. The captain kept his eyes on the oily, rounded waves in the port, while the director continued to look at him with his penetrating eyes.

"Why, for instance, don't you speak to me, comrade captain?" he asked in a different, kindly tone, almost with friendliness.

The captain hesitated for a moment; he seemed ready to make up his mind and disclose something which weighed on him, something he had known for a long time and had never confessed to anyone. Then suddenly he withdrew within himself.

"What have I to tell you?"

The director looked at him thoughtfully, searchingly. Then he murmured:

"We must have a talk. But first we must get off the Danilofca and Sulina crowd — see them on the open sea. On their return we'll talk things over."

"If you like!" the captain said indifferently.

The director cast him another searching look, then turned towards the clerks who stood on the wharf, near the cast-iron bollards which secured the cables of the *October Star*. Captain Haralamb went slowly up the gangway. His gait was heavy and tired; he was weighed down by a bitter feeling of falsehood and hypocrisy. 'Why didn't I speak right out, why? But it would have been of no use, of no use whatever. They're stronger. Stronger even than he is. It would be of no avail, of no avail...' he told himself with bitter resignation as he placed his foot on the iron flooring of the upper deck.

"Comrade Captain!"

"What is it?" he asked absent-mindedly. In front of him stood the small, unshaven storekeeper, his head shaven and a black stubble on his chin and upper lip, which was in strange contrast to his blue, shaven pate. He was small, thin and sickly-looking.

"Comrade captain," he said with an unpleasant smile, "will you please come over to the Party organization?"

"Who wants me?" the captain asked, looking him up and down.

"Comrade Preţiosu and Comrade Pricop. They say you should come without delay."

The captain closed his jaws tight. 'We haven't even put out to sea and...'

"All right, I'll come," he said in a dry voice.

A smile still on his pale face, the small storekeeper didn't move.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Are you guarding me?" the captain asked. "I said I'd come!"

He waited until the other had left, then passed his handkerchief over his forehead. 'Why should I lose my temper? I raised my voice...made a fool of myself

...What a humiliation, good God! What a humiliation!... What I've come to!...What I've come to!...

Stooping more than usual, he passed under the cabin deck and went down the iron steps — one deck — two decks. It was warm down there, stifling.

XIV

That evening, before embarking, Nicolau, the mate, together with Uncle Marinică, the boatswain, went to the regional Party committee. They were received by the second secretary, a former miner, a small, thin man with a very wrinkled face, who sat at his desk, his hands, with their fingers crossed, on a sheet of paper.

He looked at the two men in front of him: both as short as himself, though Nicolau was fat, almost paunchy, with a streak of black hair over his forehead that was beaded with sweat — for he always sweated even from a trifling effort — and the boatswain was shrivelled, only skin, bone and muscle, but with strong jaws, and eyes of a pale blue, which looked inquiringly at the regional committee secretary.

"That's why we came, Comrade," Nicolau concluded. "We thought we'd write a letter to the regional committee, then considered it'd be better if we came ourselves."

"I'm not sure I understand: are you a delegation or have you come on your own?"

"We've come on our own," the boatswain said.

Silence followed. The two looked at each other, then, with concern, at the second secretary. Nicolau said:

"Yes, only the two of us came, but most of the organization sees eye to eye with us, though they're too intimidated to do anything."

"They're afraid," the boatswain added.

"Afraid of what? Of the Party?" the second secretary asked with a dissatisfied air.

The two were silent and seemingly embarrassed. They could not say that the men did not trust the Party. Nor was that it. It was something else...

"No! They're not afraid of the Party..." Nicolau said. "But they've gone soft... They've lost their bearings... Some have begun to believe that the Party work practised among us is the right stuff...with the organizers coming down upon them for all kinds of trifling matters, not teaching them anything, not showing any care for production..."

"Did you say that care was not being shown for production work? We've received regular reports of activity in that direction..."

"On paper," the boatswain said.

He sat there with closed lips, only unlocking them to blurt out his two words and closing them again. The second secretary looked at him but Uncle Marinică had had his say. It was Nicolau who spoke again:

"That, too, is only a formality. And doesn't help production. When things don't go right, there's always an explanation: the blame is put on the engineers at the trust, and everything is smoothed over...And again we begin criticizing one another for trifles...and the men become fed up; the atmosphere's not as it should be, comrade secretary..."

The former miner looked at him thoughtfully and for long. 'I'm not a sailor, nor a fisherman,' he was thinking regretfully. 'And yet, the devil take me, this too is an enterprise with its characteristics — a productive enterprise, raising the same problems as...'But he could not see clearly. However, the men had to be assisted.

"Well, thank you for bringing this to the knowledge of the regional committee... We'll give you what help we can. And as soon as possible."

The two looked at him, and the secretary, returning their gaze, thought: 'What is the matter with these fellows? Perhaps there is something in what they say. Or maybe they themselves don't know exactly what's wrong. There might be specific characteristics in their work, and it might be a seamen's job, but it is men one has to deal with all the same.' And he knew men. You could see by the look of these chaps that something was wrong. They must be helped without fail.

"We'll help you," he said simply.

Just as simply the other two rose, shook hands with him and left.

And now, Nicolau faced Pricop Danilov and realized that Pricop Danilov did not love him.

And indeed, Pricop Danilov did not love him.

He did not love Nicolau, the mate, sitting there in the narrow, airless cabin, with a table covered with red cloth, a bookcase and the portraits of Stalin and Gheorghiu-Dej on the walls. No, Pricop did not love Nicolau. He looked with sullen satisfaction at the fat, little mate, on whose forehead beads of sweat stood, and whose hair rose from his head as he sat stiffly in his chair, feeling injured and furious, but composing himself and not daring to raise his voice as was his habit. Nor did he love the captain. No, he did not love him. He had never loved any of those who wore golden stripes on their sleeves. Many of them were simple men, as simple as himself; many of them had begun from the lowest ranks, using the broom to do statute labour, or as deck sailors on ships which later, when their hair had grown grey, they had come to command. Even so Pricop

dedicated to them slow, unforgiving hostility. What did he care what they had been and what they were, whether they were good or bad? They were in command. They had the power. They said: "Do this and that!" and you had to obey. And Pricop could not obey. He had run away from home and later, forced by hunger, he had had to obey, though unwillingly, bidding his time, awaiting the moment when he himself should be in command. Let that moment come, then see how he would order them about. He would have them under his heels — crush them. The power must be his. He had never thought too clearly of these things, but that was how he had felt ever since his childhood, since he had knocked the breath out of Siomca, the shop-boy, and the boys had come to fear him and Simion, though rather because their fathers fought shy of — and even feared — old Danilov than on account of Pricop's or Simion's greath strength. It was Pricop's habit to bully people; it had become second nature to him. And this accounted for his hatred. The others had learning: they knew mathematics, astronomy, navigation and maritime law. But what if they did? Was that a reason to order him about? To order Pricop Danilov about? Not on your life! God Almighty might have descended from heaven with golden stripes on his arm and Pricop would have been ready to teach him to go about acting as commander and ordering people.

And ever since 1944 he had taught commanders a lesson. The Communists had noted his ways and said: "He's a worker, an insurgent. He can't stand the bourgeois. He's all right."

They had taken for an insurgent's spirit what was merely wounded pride and regret for not being able to act as a master. When they saw Pricop setting

on them like a vicious hound — it was at the time when the leading personnel, the ship-captains, the companies, everything still belonged to the employers — they thought he was imbued with class spirit, that he was a militant and courageous man. And this had been of great use to Pricop in later years: among other things, the fact that his parents were kulaks had not been taken into account. "He's a resolute man and a fighter who has no truck with his former class and feels like a worker now. He's all right," were the appreciations of the Communists as they decided on his situation in the Party. Pricop knew this, but did not love them a jot more for such favourable appreciations. He remained such as he was: sullen and secretive — and such as nobody knew him — caring for no one.

Nobody ever suspected that Pricop did not care for anyone, not even for Prodan, the third member in the bureau of the Party branch. Prodan was a man with a virile countenance and a thick voice — a silent and serious man and the best helmsman of the crew. He might quickly have become a boatswain; and had he taken to learning, a pilot or even an officer, and be in command, which for Pricop would have meant that this one, too, would order him about. For Pricop drowsed as soon as he took up a book and would never come to be promoted officer even in these days. Pricop knew this well. He was loath to confess it to himself, but he knew it; he knew everything and this knowledge lay in a dark corner of his mind whence his will and his decisions issued like flames from an oven begrimed by soot and slag. How could he like them? He didn't like anyone. Nor did he want to. He had no need of them, though they needed him and feared him. And if they neither needed nor feared him, they should be made to.

Actually he despised Prodan, considering him stupid, which for him was synonymous with being decent. And he despised Constantin, the second mate, too, because he was young and jumpy. He didn't even care for Preţiosu. He felt, as he sat beside him, with that eternal cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth (Pricop didn't smoke), what an unsightly, stupid man he was — tall and thin, with a neck too long, and a head too small ... (Pricop hailed from Danilofca, where men were straight and handsome and where cleverness and even cunning were appreciated). No, he didn't care for Preţiosu. He worked in close co-operation with him, spoke to him and hammered ideas into his head, told him about his past life at sea, and kindled wishes and dreams within him, for there was in Pricop a subtle, pliant slyness, far greater than that of old Eftei who had made a fortune, not by working with his hands, but by using his wits, that were so exceedingly cunning that they didn't even show, hidden as they were under heavy, brutish sullenness. That's how it was with Pricop now. He was a man of nearly forty, greying before his time, stoutish, with a square face that seemed to be carved out of stone, with straight, shining, freshly-shaven cheeks, as he rested his elbows on the table covered with red cloth and held his peace: altogether a sullen, heavy, deep man. Prodan too was silent. His face was unreadable, but Pricop knew that he was displeased. That didn't matter, let him be. The captain was trying to appear at his ease, but under his forced smile, the uncomfortable tension of his nerves could be detected. Nicolau, perspiring freely, clenched his teeth. Constantin was huddled up in a corner. The second officer was on duty. But he would hear of it all in good time.

"...A commanding attitude, comrade captain," Preţiosu said coldly and with a superior air." It doesn't do!"

"If I'm the captain it is to command," Haralamb explained with forced merriment. "Orders must be given and executed on board ship and in a military unit; if not, everybody is done for in storm or battle!"

"We know that," Preţiosu said, "we know that..."

He was at a loss for an answer but was loath to show that he was in the wrong. Pricop despised him at that moment too. As if it wasn't easy to stop their mouths when they talked common sense to you — made a simple reckoning, like putting two and two together, as any old woman might. Simple like child's play! Unconcernedly, but to show Preţiosu what he should be driving at, he broke in with the question:

"So you come to Comrade Nicolau's defence?"

Prodan who had remained silent until then, stopped him. (He was aware of the other's aim and did not like it.)

"Don't hurry the matter. Let's discuss in an organized way."

"No, no!" Preţiosu put in. "Comrade Pricop is right! He's right! So you side with Comrade Nicolau? You don't agree with the Party?"

The captain looked at him fixedly and reddened. He wiped his wrinkled forehead with his handkerchief and shrugged his shoulders, discouraged:

"If that's how you put things, why discuss them further?..."

"Oh, we're not discussing them," and Pricop gave a short, harsh laugh — not a pleasant one, for not even when he laughed was he pleasant.

"We're not discussing!" Preţiosu repeated. "It is not correct, Comrade, that the comrade officers should shout at the men and swear at them..."

"Who has sworn at them?" Nicolau burst out. Until then he had been silent, merely staring at Preţiosu. "I was a sailor once, Comrade, and know a sailor's duty. If I'd been in that fellow's shoes I should have kept a civil tongue in my head and have known that the mate was right. And don't tell me I swear at the men... I've heard enough cursing and damning in the past to know what it's like. So let's discuss things honestly, Comrades, and in good faith!"

"Comrade, it is not right you should shout at the comrade secretary," Pricop said severely and with satisfaction.

Nicolau stopped talking and looked away. He shrugged his shoulders hopelessly and then again turned towards them:

"Well, that's my way — to shout! That's me — quick-tempered! What shall I do about it? Commit suicide? Come, Comrades, are we a young ladies' boarding school? Lae's feelings are hurt, the comrade is hurt... is that our concern? Or is production?"

"Leave production alone, Comrade," Preţiosu said, "we'll discuss that another time; and in an organized way, you're a Party member, aren't you?"

"Yes, I'm a Party member!" Nicolau answered darkly, as if he had uttered a threat.

However Preţiosu ignored it and went on:

"We are discussing now the commanding attitude you and the other comrade officers have adopted, for Comrade Constantin mustn't think he's overlooked, even though he's hiding in a corner... Oh! I've heard

you, Comrade," and he laughed heavily as if he had made a joke, then resumed in a monotone:

"It won't do, Comrades... today the *people* are at the head of the state... it's no longer as in the days of the bourgeoisie, when the officers maltreated the sailors."

"Who's maltreated any sailors on this ship?" Nicolau exclaimed angrily. "Why talk such rot? Who's been swearing at anyone? We're wasting our time. Wasting the time we should rest in, Comrade — wasting many hours of our life in empty talk!"

"If you can't endure being criticized," Preţiosu said, stung, "let me speak first... and then you can have your say... The people, Comrade! You, too, are in the service of the people, and whether you like it or not, you must serve the people. Otherwise you're no good, and the old ways, the old methods won't do. Learn to raise your level, Comrade Captain; learn to deal with the men properly, to educate them and not to treat them as in the past... you don't take to criticism, Comrades. Not in the slightest. But we are patient and we'll criticize you until you do..."

Nicolau wiped the sweat off his forehead. He seemed tortured. Then he began to look at the walls with glassy eyes. The captain smoked, his chin resting on his chest. Preţiosu went on talking, repeating what he'd already said, lengthening things interminably, becoming tiresome... Pricop nodded approval at the conclusion of every sentence, without uttering a word.

Prodan was silent, frowning, and seemed to isolate himself. Later, when the meeting ended and they separated coldly, he stayed behind in the little room with Preţiosu and Pricop. Preţiosu stretched and said:

"Well, I've taught those aristocrats a lesson..."

"Those Goddam lepers!" Pricop corroborated, all harshness. "They must know which is the leading force!"

Then Prodan spoke:

"I've told you before and I tell you again: you're not going the right way about it! The Party teaches us differently, brothers! Can't you see you're putting their backs up? Why criticize them for nothing? You should have criticized only Nicolau for his hasty words; though don't forget that he's a comrade, and we haven't many like him. You talk about the way to deal with people. How are you dealing with *them*? Do you think you've made the captain and Constantin like the Party any the better?"

He fell into silence — an angry, bitter silence. Then he repeated:

"No, it's not the right way! It's not as it should be!"

"If you don't agree, why not get up at the Party meeting and say so?" Preţiosu said drily.

"I will!" Prodan said, and went out, banging the door.

"Much good may it do him," Preţiosu said with an unfriendly grin, looking at the sheet-iron door.

Pricop did not speak. He despised Preţiosu for his lack of self-control, and calculated quickly as to the chance of difficulties arising at the Party meeting. No, there was no danger. However, he would go to Prodan tonight and say: "Now, old man, don't get riled. Preţiosu has his shortcomings, but the line he takes is correct... Think it over: d'you want to attack the Party line?" That'll make Prodan hesitate. Danger! What danger could there be? *He* was the master on the vessel. It was not written anywhere, nobody admitted it — Pricop was only a helmsman — but they all

knew it. There was no way of saying it — such a thing could not be expressed in words, and yet everybody knew. Comrade Preţiosu represented the Party organization and Comrade Preţiosu obeyed Comrade Pricop.

But the thought that he was master no longer gave him any pleasure.

XV

The captain had left the room without saying good night. He went up the iron steps slowly, with the tread of an old and weary man, from the third deck to the second, and out on to the upper deck, in the cold spring wind which drove columns of smoke over the waters in the port. Somebody had climbed up behind him, step after step, but the captain had not turned round. It might have been Preţiosu or Pricop and he had not wanted to see them. No, he did not want to face them: he'd had enough for that day. He gripped the oily iron rail and began climbing another flight of steps which led to the cabin deck. The man behind him was following him up these steps too. The captain felt he could no longer keep himself in check. He would turn round and collar the fellow. 'Not even now will you leave me alone?' he would ask. 'Have you still something to say? Haven't you said enough?...'

From the cabin deck he went up another flight of steps towards the chart-room. The other came on close behind. 'Is there no way of shaking him off, no way? No! I'm helpless,' the captain said to himself, making a wry face. In a way he despised himself because he did not turn round and grip Pricop or Preţiosu or whoever it was by the throat and end the affair once

and for all. Of course, then he'd lose the command of his boat and would have to seek a post on land: become a scribbler, a care-taker, anything; or embark as an officer on one of the merchant ships which sailed all the seas of the world. But he couldn't do that. No, there was something which held him back, kept him at the mercy of Preţiosu and Pricop who followed him everywhere, even up to this spot! There were some more steps to go — those leading to the signal room. The captain began to climb these too. Clap, clap, clap! Again the steps of the man behind him. The captain wiped the sweat off his forehead, although a cold wind was blowing, presaging rain or even a late snowfall. He went into the empty signal room. It was dark here. The metal of the compass and the wheel had a dull gloss. On the map table, the binoculars, left there during the day, looked like black, motionless crabs. There wasn't enough air. The captain passed on to the other watch deck, a narrow place, high above the upper deck. He rested his elbows on the rail and looked down over the quay. A lorry was leaving; the winches no longer operated. The director was no longer there. The quay was deserted.

The man who had dogged his footsteps was now close upon him, but still didn't speak. Even here? Had he really come as far as here? He would pass him without a word, and lock himself in his cabin, however hot and stifling it might be. But at last he saw his man: it was Nicolau, the mate. That little thick-set man now stood beside him, looking at the lights, the clouds of smoke and the sleek black waves in the port. The captain felt one last tremor of painful irritation: 'Why the devil hadn't he spoken? The idiot!' But his ill-humour soon passed. Nicolau was a man in whose company he could

hold his peace without feeling uncomfortable. It was good Nicolau had come!

"Well, what d'you say?" the captain asked him.

His eyes on a black picket-boat on the dark waters of the port, Nicolau answered:

"They mean well, comrade captain — their intentions are all right, but sometimes they go the wrong way about things... they make mistakes."

He sounded confused and did not look at the captain as he spoke. The latter said with bitterness:

"You don't believe what you say. You want to defend them because you're a Party member and you're ashamed of them..."

He sighed, then murmured:

"Sometimes I feel like bursting. Like roaring and throwing things at them... and going off! Away somewhere! Ridding myself of this ramshackle hundred-year-old carcass and looking for another job. Embark as mate on some cargo-boat. I've captained ships for fifteen years; but now I'm ready to be a helmsman, an ordinary seaman, anything. I shouldn't get a captain's job again, you know that. There are more captains than vessels in the world and it's the young ones that are wanted now. The chance to work on a ship, and a bed, are all I need. I'd do anything! Wash the decks! I did it when I was seventeen; when I ran away from home to become a sailor. I didn't know then, d'you hear me, I didn't know that when I'd turned fifty I should be made a door-mat of by such people. Had I known it, I'd have pitched myself overboard a few days' sail from shore, and have done with it... but now I've children and I need a wage to keep them. For their sake I must be the slave I am — must remain on this stinking ship as long as Comrades Pricop and Preţiosu condescend to keep me. And when

they decide to shove me off it, I don't want it to be for any fault of mine at least; I'd like to feel at peace with my conscience and not to have to reproach myself with having taken my children's bread from them..."

He drew in his breath sharply and then lighted a cigarette. Nicolau spoke with difficulty:

"Don't take it so much to heart... They'll see sense..."

The captain, with a furious movement, threw the cigarette he had only just lighted over the rail. The cigarette fell, a red point through the darkness, going out immediately on touching the water.

"They'll see sense, you say? And what'll become of me by that time? When they've got sense into them, I myself'll be senseless! Do I need to be humiliated and degraded now that I have grown grey? And even if I were younger — what's the need of it? What purpose does it serve?"

"They don't know you," Nicolau mumbled. "They think you are a captain such as..."

"Such as? Such people are no longer put in command of ships. If I've been put to captain this boat it means that I'm not a knave, a tyrant, a smuggler, some corruptible sea-rover — nor base and bold like those you speak about. Why do they treat me as if I were? Do I act like one? Do I, man?" the captain said almost pleadingly. "We've often sailed together; talked together, leaning on the rail like this, looking down at the quays of Bombay, Algiers or Hamburg — you must remember what I've been like!" He was silent for a moment, then burst out, both hurt and furious:

"In the service of the people indeed! And where, in God's name, is my guilt? Did I engage in the service of shipowners or shipping companies because I liked

it? Did I like bringing my ship through the storms of the North Sea, the fogs of Newfoundland, the cyclones in the Pacific, with the barometer at 740—730, ready to be swamped at any moment, and all to allow privileged gentlemen to practise winter sports in Switzerland in the summer, and play cards at Monte Carlo in the winter? In the service of the people indeed! Don't the poor devils know that I prefer to be in their service? yes, in the service of a Pricop and Preţiosu, rather than in that of a company... if only they wouldn't torture me; if only they'd leave me alone!..."

He had said these last words in a low voice, with a despairing, stifled passion, when suddenly his expression changed:

"But here I am speaking about my own troubles while you, poor chap, are far worse off... They pitch into you still more..."

"That doesn't matter," Nicolau answered curtly. He swallowed hard and added: "That doesn't matter. Criticism and self-criticism are necessary; without them we'll never progress."

"On serious matters I agree: discipline, production on board, the management of funds, forces, and time! To do away with anarchy, truancy and dilly-dallying! That should be their concern, not mean, spiteful accusations, and getting on people's nerves with slogans and big words which are nothing but lies coming from them!" The captain had answered with still greater vehemence and it was plain he had thought things over for a long time and that now they came from him almost without his being aware of it.

"They're only two people, they're not the Party," the thick-set little mate said with a great effort.

"But who is the Party here on board? They are. Isn't the Party made up of men? Well, they're it, they're the Party on board this ship! I see no other."

"On board this ship the Party is the Party branch," Nicolau said rigidly.

"Who?" the commander queried. "You? Or Prodan?"

"I, Prodan and others."

The captain wanted to say something but checked himself for fear of offending Nicolau. His chin resting on his palm, he remained looking at the deserted quay. A dismal roar came from a ship in the port that had already signalled to be piloted, heaven knew how many times. Nicolau stood silently by Captain Haralamb who was completely unaware of what was going on in the Communist's heart. For a long time the latter had been possessed by a feeling of shame; obsessed by a sense of guilt, of a duty unfulfilled; he had a duty towards many people, and among those many was the captain. His gloom and depression he felt originated from other things than the behaviour of Preţiosu and Pricop and their crowd on board ship towards him. He found it easier to overlook something that hurt him, than that which hurt the cause he believed in, and to which he had pledged his honour.

The captain suddenly turned towards him:

"I can't understand you! What sort of a chap are you? Are you dense? Are you afraid? What is it?"

Nicolau again swallowed hard and said:

"It's a pity you have no confidence in me... but you should have confidence in the Party. You must trust the Party more." The captain turned round sharply and looked at the wharf below, without seeing it.

A noisy crowd was passing along it, calling out merrily, shouting and singing in hoarse voices; they were burly men, some of them with big, fair beards; on their back they carried cases, bundles, sacks, and one of them a rolled-up red quilt. They greeted the vessel with ironical roars:

"Oh, *Mother*! There's our *Mother*! How goes it, Old Woman?"

The captain straightened himself.

"They've come... see everyone's at his post and get her under steam. We're sailing."

And while Nicolau made for the steps, the captain murmured to himself:

"Usually I was glad when I left port and put out to sea."

"Did you say anything?" Nicolau asked.

"No, just signal for the pilot."

Nicolau put out his hand and groped for the wire in the darkness. From near the funnel issued a cloud of white smoke and a mighty roar from some unknown chasm — the roar of a blind and gigantic pain: Wooo! Wooo! Wooo!

XVI

Spiru Vasiliu had learned not to feel offended when given orders in a tone he would never have accepted formerly, especially from a man like the director of the fleet. He knew that the director was a man of the people, a former sailor, while he, Spiru Vasiliu, was the son of once well-to-do people, and had gone through a Merchant Navy Academy at Leghorn. Now, the revolution had brought him low and turned him into a small

clerk, and a former sailor into the director of a high sea fishing fleet. That was how the play went and it had to be acted! And that is why Spiru Vasiliu submitted without flinching; awaiting the crucial moment when he would show his fangs and get his own back on the director. Until then, he had to be patient — to do his job. In a way he was pleased that things didn't go as they should, that the men were indisciplined and the departure of the fleet had been postponed. A day's delay meant dozens of tons of tinned fish the less. What of it? Where was the harm? You might say it was all the better! Why did *they* need so much tinned fish? So spoke Spiru Vasiliu to himself with a hostile kind of good humour. Let things go to the dogs!

However he still had to round up the fishermen: that was his job. And if he lost it, he would starve until he found another. So he went along the streets around the port in search of them. He knew their favourite pubs and eating-houses. In the first pub — an empty room with a single lamp which shed a dim light over its poverty and coldness, its damp walls, the three-legged stools, the dry and empty counter and the dirty posters — the publican greeted him with respect and despondency:

"Evening, Captain! Yes, they were here, sir... but left after they had their drink... No! there's no more drink today; but tomorrow I'll be having more. Where they've gone? Maybe to Panaitache's..."

The woman who sat at the desk in the Panaitache eating-house — a woman with an olive complexion, a big nose and her hair drawn back in a scanty bun, which was rather a knot of hair at the back of her head than a proper bun — looked at him with black, sorrowful eyes. The poor woman was like a sick crow, but she

looked at him with the enraptured attention which many women had shown at the sight of him. Spiru Vasiliu smiled at her, showing his big white teeth and turned towards Panaitache. The latter raised his hands to signify that he could not answer him:

"They've been here... we had nothing to give them...they may have gone to a state establishment... they swore at me and went away..."

The man in charge of the state-owned eating-house greeted him in angry tones:

"I've thrown them out, Comrade, they created a disturbance... Look over there."

And he pointed to a broken mirror.

"They can't be rowdy here; this is a respectable state establishment and not a pub..."

Spiru Vasiliu continued his search. The fishermen of Danilofca had been everywhere and from everywhere had gone on, dissatisfied yet merry. Behind them the waiters and publicans nursed their wounded feelings sullenly, collected the bottles thrown on the floor and looked over their bills to see whether they had not made any mistake in the hullabaloo their rowdy customers had raised. After a two hours' walk through the town — there was a cutting wind blowing, too, which raised columns of dust and paper, and made Spiru Vasiliu gather his thin clothes about him — he finally found them. It was the noise they were kicking up that told him he had come upon them at last. It could be heard through the closed door, the small, vapour-dimmed windows and the plank walls of the little house with its rusty iron-sheet roofing. Thick cigarette smoke and warm vapour, the smell of strong drinks and sea outfit, and the deep-toned roars of the fishermen met him as he opened the door. Emelian Romanov whose father

had been drowned long ago, fishing on the high seas, was there. And there were also Iermolai Popov and Foma Afanasie and Simion Danilov, brother of Pricop of the *October Star*, and others — all broad-shouldered, deep-chested men, some with fair beards, others with red, and almost all with blue or grey eyes. Their eyes sparkled and the drink had heightened the colour of their cheeks and noses and made their faces glow with merriment like street-lamps.

"Look at him: that's him!" Emelian Romanov roared. He had pushed his crumpled cap to the back of his head and was pointing with his thick, calloused hand, to a young man whom Spiru Vasiliu believed to be standing, but who at that moment rose from his seat and stretched to a height of another two feet. The young fellow was about twenty and unusually tall, broad-shouldered and handsome. He moved his large, long arms awkwardly and smiled timidly; his eyes were soft and as limpid as water. His tanned, sunburnt face and curly hair made him look like a boy of twelve who had miraculously grown a full head taller than the very tall fishermen about him who lounged on their chairs, with their elbows on the tables, and their boxes, sacks, high-boots and quilts about them (which the publican coming with the bottles and glasses had to avoid, walking like a heron, so as not to come a cropper).

"That's him!" Emelian Romanov roared again. "Hi you, Cosma, tell us how it was!"

The young giant was visibly uneasy and unable to utter a word.

"Well, I'll tell you!" Emelian said. "While I was coming from the fields with my wife and son — the youngest of 'em — I must needs jump from the cart and go behind a bush. Continuing my way along the road

to catch up with the cart, what should I see but a little squat fellow standing in the field by the roadside. When I got nearer it wasn't a little squat fellow at all; it was this chump sitting on his behind, his legs in the ditch. Now, folks, don't laugh like a set of fools. He sat there with a pair of new trousers on his knees, looking at 'em. Wasn't that so, Cosma?"

"It was," the young fellow mumbled.

"Stop your haws, you guzzlers, or you'll make me forget... Stop it, you crowd of boozers! You're drunk, my fine fisherlads, and laugh like old women! Haw! haw! haw! Well, listen here. I went up to him: 'Whatch'you doing here, me lad?' I said. He looked at me and laughed. 'Whatch'you laughing at, man? Is there something wrong with me nose?' 'I'm not laughing at you,' he said. 'At who then?' 'Nobody in particular, I'm just laughing.'

"I took another look at him. Leave him alone, Emelian, and get going, I says, he's off his chump; to laugh like that, sounds as if he'd like to break iron with his teeth; God protect you from such a laugh... But still I didn't show how neatly I could trip it. I thought he might be in trouble. Who knows? A young'un with a heartache. 'Whatch'you laughing at, man?' I says again. 'I don't know,' he says. 'I think at the world.' 'Whatch'you mean, at the world?' 'Well, what sort of a world is it, Uncle — sorry, but I don't know what yer name is...' 'Emelian's my name,' I says. 'What sort of a fool world is it, Uncle Emelian?' And then suddenly he plants his elbows on the ground and begins to laugh so that his poor belly shakes. He no longer looked like breaking iron with his teeth, though he was laughing all right! Yes! the tears ran down his cheeks and he just shook with laughin'!"

A silence had fallen on the pub. No one looked at Spiru Vasiliu. Still sitting at their tables, they had their eyes turned on Emelian and the enormous youth and were examining them with care and wonder, full of excitement at the thought that a very good story would follow.

" 'Tell me why you laugh, man?' I said, angry now. At which he said: 'Uncle, d'you see these trousers here?' 'Of course, I sees 'em, how can I help seeing 'em?' 'Well, they're new trousers from the town.' 'As you say, they're new,' 'Yes ! but you don't know that they're twelve years old.' 'Twelve years old?' I says. 'Yes, twelve years old,' he answers. 'I served a man twelve years as a farm-hand — from the time I was eight till yesterday. That makes twelve years. Yesterday I said to him: 'Uncle Eftihei, I want to go and learn a trade. Give me my wages.' 'Your wages?' he says, 'but haven't I fed you, boy? Haven't I brought you up?' 'Leave that !' I said. 'Didn't I follow the cattle in the marshes through the sedge where there's nothing but serpents, without so much as a shirt and trousers; and didn't I steal moor-hen's eggs in the sedge — the green ones, you know, and eat them? If it 'ad been left to you... As far as you cared...' At which he, that is the master, suddenly pulled a long face: 'Bold as brass is what the world's like today,' he says. 'It won't acknowledge the good you've done ! You want money, Cosma, do you? Well, here's some and be gone, and God be with you !' And he gave some money to the boy. But what did he know about money, this youngster here, a wild thing brought up in the marshes? It seemed a great deal, it seemed enough. He took off his cap nicely, said good-bye and was gone. He came to town to buy clothes for himself. The money was enough for a pair of trousers... Here they are, my fine fisherlads !"

And Emelian extricated the trousers from among other things and held them up. Uncontrolled laughter seized the fishermen. They rose from their table, overthrew their chairs to come and see the famous trousers, for which Cosma had worked twelve years. The latter was smiling serenely now. But Iermolai was crying, striking his chest with his fist as if it had been a sack of something.

"That's not justice! We must go, brothers, and get hold of the man! He must put down every penny he owes him! He must put it down or I'll — I'll step on him — knock him about until he forgets his own name and the blood of those who made him!"

"Ho, you son of a gun!" Emelian said. "I took care of that; I went with the lad where we had to go and did what was necessary... That man'll fork out the money all right, have no fear... but in the meantime, Cosma comes with me to learn a trade where there are no kulaks, no farm-hands, no nothing. You reach the norm, well and good! You top it, still better. That's life real and fine. Five days at home and then you go to sea for a rest. You fish for a day and then sit idle. You drop your line into the sea and sit idle again; you take your fish to the ship, the mother-ship, and once again sit idle; then you let out some four miles of line, taking up some six to eight hours, and idle anew; you sit idle all the time; you don't even have the time to sleep, so much idling you do; and after you've had a good rest, you come to land for five days and feel sick because the blasted earth doesn't roll day and night and it's so quiet all the time: and then you go to sea again for a month and start idling once more."

The fishermen roared with laughter. Iermolai hiccupped, reeled and drew Cosma by his belt towards him. Between hiccups he explained seriously:

"You're idle, you know, because you're sitting all the time — understand? For you can't very well stand in a boat, can you? Ha, ha, ha, ha! Haw, haw, haw!"

No longer able to contain himself, he now burst out into a thunderous laughter and shook with it; and he kept tugging at Cosma's belt, as if he would shake him like a rag doll — which would probably have been the case with many another man. But Cosma was too big and too heavy and did not budge. He merely smiled and murmured:

"I'm not scared of work..."

For the time being and without being aware of it, Spiru Vasiliu had forgotten his purpose there. Now, however, he remembered and shouted:

"Comrades, the fleet is waiting for you! *Mother* is ready to put out and the fishing smacks too, and you're wasting your time here... Come on, off with you!"

"There he is," one of the fishermen said in an unfriendly tone. They had become quieter again and now turned round towards Spiru Vasiliu in surprise.

"There's the gentleman," the same voice repeated just as jeeringly, and in the same unfriendly manner.

Spiru Vasiliu recognized the man who had spoken: it was one Danilov, Simion Danilov, a good fisherman. Simion Danilov sat frowning and silent in a corner. He had drunk a lot, had paid for the drinks of the other members of his brigade when he had seen they had got through their money, and had offered a bottle to Emelian Romanov, Iermolai Popov and Afanasie as well. He had not spoken but just gone on drinking, his face

becoming darker all the while. He did not care for his company either — for these village tatterdemalions, who not so long ago had come humbly to his father, with bowed heads and their caps in their hands; nor did he care for the clerk who had come into the pub to call them to their jobs, and especially to tell him, Simion, what to do and what not to do. Simion hated his fellow men; he hated the world in general, because he had at one time hankered for the love of a woman who had not returned his love and did not love him even now. And this was poisoning him like a slow disease that eats into one and finally saps one's strength and power to oppose it, until one simply goes out like a candle.

Darkly he felt that there was no way out for him and he would have liked to take his revenge on all, on the whole world. He sometimes thought: 'If I were a fire, I'd burn the world; if I were water, I'd drown it...'

"Here's the gentleman..." he said again insolently.

Emelian Romanov rose and went to meet Spiru Vasiliu:

"Come and sit at our table, Comrade Vasiliu," he said, pushing a stool towards him, and handing him a glass of brandy and clinking his glass with his.

"Now, don't refuse us, Comrade Vasiliu," he went on, "we're workers — not much to speak of, but maybe you'll drink with us for all that. That's right: good health and luck! Strong, eh? Well, we're more used to it. Hard work and the sea wind, for ever and aye... We can stand a rough life better than you townspeople..."

The men had crowded around them. Spiru Vasiliu had choked a little on account of the strong brandy, and tears had come to his eyes. Emelian Romanov, with a hard glint of merriment in his blue eyes, went on:

"And now that we're all comfortably seated, like comrades and friends... perhaps you'll tell us why you've not given us hurricane-lamps for the boats."

The people in the pub were silent. Spiru Vasiliu gave a start and looked around him. With flushed faces and sparkling eyes, the bearded men, and the young ones with shaven chins, were looking at him in a way which made him anxious.

"We haven't received chimneys for the hurricane-lamps, Uncle Emelian..."

"Haven't you now? But did you ask for them?"

"Of course we did! We take good care to protect the fishermen at their work..."

"Aye! you take good care, don't you? It's a good thing that someone takes care of us, wretched folk that we are, for if there's a storm and though *Mother* might go about the whole night trying to collect us from wherever we are on the sea, and the cutter and fishing smacks, too, they might not find us, for it's possible they've run us down, or the propeller has cut us to bits, or else the storm taken us to the back of beyond. But we have labour protection, we have hurricane-lamps to show where we are... hurricane-lamps without chimneys to them, hurricane-lamps without any chimneys; good luck, Comrades, good luck and good health! Good luck, fishermen all! Clink your glasses with mine, for we're drinking Simion's money which he has enough of; good luck! for it's luck we need; or it'll go hard with us, for this comrade here takes care of our life — God keep us from harm — good luck!"

The fishermen laughed and crowded more closely around Spiru Vasiliu, to clink glasses with him. The latter laughed uncomfortably. Simion Danilov whispered into Emelian's ear:

"Tell him about your brigade..."

"Yes, yes !" Emelian Romanov roared good-humouredly. "Our brigade has been a frontranker in the fleet for the last three months; maybe we'll shortly be awarded the title of front-rank brigade. And now, the crew of our boat is incomplete. Isn't it strange that it should be our boat that is one man short? A good thing you look after us, for otherwise who knows what our output would be... It's a good thing though you don't allow us to have our way. If you did, we might produce more..."

Spiru Vasiliu laughed a forced laugh:

"What can we do, Uncle Emelian? We do what we can..."

"A good thing you can't do more !" Iermolai roared.

"If you're not satisfied, speak about it at the production meeting, not here !" Spiru Vasiliu said, raising his voice in annoyance. Then he grew pale, for the moment he said the words, he felt he could have bitten off his tongue; but it was too late.

"Don't think we won't do that !" Emelian Romanov said with a hoarse laugh. "We'll speak about it all right and then take care. Here's to you !"

"No, thanks, no more drink; come along, brothers, the whole fleet is waiting for us..."

"Who are you to order us about?" Simion Danilov asked, rising threateningly from his seat.

"Sit down, Simion," Emelian said.

"Let him drink with us or let him go to..." Simion roared. "Here, drink this!"

There was a great uproar, everybody speaking at once, some wanting to stay on, others wanting to stay minus the presence of Spiru Vasiliu who, according to them, was to go — well, you know — to a certain place,

while others still agreed that the time had come for them all to quit. A quarrel was brewing; some two or three fishermen had fallen asleep on their chairs; while Simion Danilov had withdrawn into his corner, and only spoke when he saw that the noise was subsiding and he could roar out some ill-natured thing which would start them off again. At long last, Emelian Romanov shouldered his box, seized Iermolai's red quilt and, throwing it at his head, shouted:

"Front-rank brigade, come on, boys! Rally to the cause! We're off! Steer to the right or you'll get what for!"

And he left the public house with Cosma and a few other fishermen after him, while Iermolai, extricating himself from the quilt with difficulty, and showing a bearded, tousled head, with bulging eyes, roared out:

"Hi, Emelian! Wait a moment, we're coming too!"

And then the rest of them poured out pell-mell, Simion Danilov mutely and with bent head as he nursed his spite and sorrow. Spiru Vasiliu came last, all atremble with nerves. Emelian's heavy and smarting joke had humiliated him and he swore at them between his teeth: "...The dirty louts!"

On the quay he ran into the director.

"Rather a long time, weren't you?" the latter said.

Spiru Vasiliu did not answer. He drew his coat closer. A cold wind — colder than a short while before — was blowing. Maybe it would snow again tonight.

"Have they all safety outfits? Everything they need?" the director asked.

"They have, blast them," Spiru Vasiliu mumbled between his teeth, then added hurriedly: "Though if they find they need anything else, I'll take it to them in a smack tomorrow."

"You'll please stay where you are," the director said severely. "You know very well, we've a meeting to see how the work is going ! You've got into the habit of being more at sea than on land; and whenever we need you nobody knows where to find you. 'Comrade Vasiliu is out at sea with the fleet !' We'll put a stop to such habits," he concluded drily.

Spiru Vasiliu did not reply. After a moment, the director had already forgotten him. The scene was a noisy one, with men calling to each other. A bustling press of men; the sailors of the *October Star* and the workers on the quay were pulling up the gangway and ladders and letting down the cables; the hooter moaned in great pain, the searchlights of the ship swept the wharf, the water in the port, and the metal scaffolding in front of the silos. The director went to see the fishermen off. Those captaining the fishing smacks, and the mechanics on the cutters which were to leave port two hours after the *October Star* and meet her on the high sea, a four hours' sail north—north-east, came to him complaining:

"Comrade, they don't want to sleep on the fishing smack or in the hold of the cutters, where it's warm. They'll sleep only in their boats !"

The director tried to persuade the fishermen, but without success. Iermolai Popov had tucked himself under his quilt in his boat, his beard over the quilt and his cap drawn over his nose.

"We're used to it," he answered without stirring, watching the director from the corner of one small sly eye.

The director had another try with Emelian, but the latter was not to be persuaded either.

"I won't leave my boats. They may be towed by the cutter, but I'm responsible for them."

While Simion Danilov said nothing distinctly, merely muttering some oaths which the director pretended not to hear.

When the *October Star* had sailed away and the cutters were also preparing to leave, there was not a soul on the deserted wharves, save for the director of the fleet who stood there alone — a solitary figure. It began to snow; the snowflakes danced in the light of the reflectors and the wind blew them away from the concrete wharves. The electric lights were swinging in the wind. The director again went up to the boats that swayed on the waves of a greenish-black, poisonous hue. The fishermen were sleeping, their blankets over their heads. The snow settled over them in a thin layer, where they were sheltered from the wind. Iermolai Popov slept deeply under his quilt. The snowflakes melted on his face, but accumulated on his eyebrows and beard: Iermolai had a big white beard of snow. The director wanted to laugh but he felt too cold. He shivered and went away, and going up the steps towards the town, he caught sight of the fishing smacks and cutters sailing out of port between the lighted buoys, the fishing boats in tow, and the fishermen asleep in them, bound for places far out at sea: Iermolai with his beard and eyebrows covered with snow, and Emelian, and all the others... The director sighed and set out quickly along the deserted streets. Passing by a big building where light still showed through the windows, he asked the man on watch at the gate:

"Is comrade first secretary still here? Tell him the director of the fishing fleet wants to see him."

The man dialled a number, then nodded. The director went up through silent, empty passages, knocked

at a door, and entered. The regional Party secretary was writing by the light of a desk lamp.

"Good evening to you... Take a seat. Has the fleet put out?"

"Yes," the director said and sat down. Suddenly he realized how tired he was.

"It's the fishing fleet I came to speak to you about... and not only as its director, but as a member of the regional Party committee."

The secretary gave a faint smile:

"Why do you speak so solemnly?"

"Because I'm speaking of a solemn matter. Our fleet provides the country with a great percentage of its fish production, and in the coal-fields and the biggest combinats our tinned fish..."

"One moment," the secretary said, laughing with the same weary good-humour as he raised his hand. "Don't talk to me about the importance of fishing, *that* I know. But what's wrong with it?"

"How do you know that anything's wrong?"

"By the way you began..." the secretary said, laughing again. "Come now, out with it. Give the facts: What's wrong? What can we do to help you?"

The director began to speak and spoke for a long time. There were many things to speak about. The indiscipline, the tendency towards anarchy, the bad atmosphere, lack of enthusiasm among the men, their low political level. These were signs that the Party organization on board ship was not doing its job properly!...

"I'm surprised," the secretary said. "We know the secretary there to be a serious, vigilant fellow. There have been times when we've been informed of the mistakes of our militants, but..."

"The thing must be looked into more closely," the director said, "something's gone wrong — there's something rotten there!"

"We'll send an instructor," the other murmured. He was thinking: 'But there are no people available; they've all got assignments... however let's see...'

He dialled a number:

"Still at work? Don't you ever go to bed, man? Yes, come over for a minute..."

He replaced the receiver.

"We have a very good instructor. He's still new on the job. Been sent over to us from the trade union. Been a fisherman too. Poor chap, if you knew what a life he's led — a novel; only he's not very talkative, doesn't like to speak about himself."

There was a knock at the door. A man of thirty odd, tall and broad-shouldered, came in. He looked older than he was on account of the greying hair at his temples and of the wrinkles about his mouth. His grey eyes were grave and there was about his whole countenance something stern and reserved, and of a controlled power and great sadness. He remained standing at the door.

"Come in and take a seat. This is Comrade Jora and this is comrade director of the fishing fleet. Comrade Jora, when will you have finished that report?"

"In a few days," the newcomer answered sitting down on the chair. He sat bolt upright, his hands — big bony hands — on his knees. "Writing is rather difficult for me," he said with a faint smile. "I'm no great scholar..."

"But you're a fisherman?" the secretary asked with a friendly smile.

"I was, once."

He had answered curtly, as if speaking of something forgotten and buried and which had no significance whatever now.

"Well, that's all right then. Comrade director will tell you what the problem is and we'll see if you can help us."

He turned towards the director of the fleet:

"Tell him all about it, man; we'll send him with the fleet as an instructor. He's been a fisherman once and he knows their problems..."

Adam Jora, formerly a fisherman, still sat upright in his chair, his big hands on his knees, as quiet and stern as if no one had spoken about him.

XVII

Spiru Vasiliu was furious with the director for obliging him to come to the office the next day, to attend a meeting which, for him, Spiru Vasiliu, implied only deadly boredom or trouble, plus the fear of losing his job and a feverish quest of acrobatic explanations to the director and the chief engineer who would call him to account for something or other.

And he fumed with anger, and suffered tortures, too, because the director had forbidden him to sail with the smack next day to the *October Star*. Lately Spiru Vasiliu had made a habit of going out to sea in the fishing smack. For long hours, sometimes for whole days, he saw nothing but the deserted sea — for the fishing grounds were outside the usual commercial route — and he would picture himself after a long voyage, somewhere on a distant ocean, as in the good old days of fifteen or twenty years ago. The days he spent on the fishing

smacks were the only ones when he felt less stifled, for when he walked in the streets of the town, or in the port, an unpleasant, oppressive and strange feeling got hold of him. There was animation in the port, but not the uproar and the confused bustle of former times; you no longer saw foreign sailors on the loose, and the cars were not of the same make as formerly. Some of the flags you saw in the old days no longer flew at the masts — there were new ones in their place; everything was invested with a stern, greyish soberness, which he found unsatisfactory, and which got on his nerves. But he felt still worse in the streets of the town. Once there had been hotels there with grand names — "Queen Mary," "Grand Hotel," — and banks with dark silent passages, soft carpets and drawn blinds; and shipping agencies, and the offices of importers and exporters; there had been restaurants, night clubs and brothels. And he would walk about the streets as in a dream, butting into people who turned to look after him in wonder and would jokingly say:

"Look at him, he's started early... easy with the bottle, Comrade !"

They didn't know he was walking in the past, that in these quiet streets he met with many memories of smart, profiteering ships' captains, of slow, grave, comfortable, weary bankers, of restaurant owners, who brightened up when they saw him, of "girls" who hung on his arms when he, Spiru Vasiliu, the mate of the *Arabella Robertson* entered some place. He looked around. Nothing of all this had been left. In the same buildings there were other people and other arrangements. State institutions, state administrations, the State Bank of the Rumanian People's Republic, State Restaurant N° 1, where factory workers, officers and clerks had their

meals — some of them unshaven and without a neck-tie — and where he, formerly so smart and prosperous, could not enter now because his small salary did not permit him.

Everything for him was grey and bleak, without any glamour and that overflowing wealth and entertainment he had once so enjoyed here, in this same town, in these same streets. A number of the houses he passed had rooms where events had happened that made him smile or frown — a gamble, a love-affair, a practical joke, a scuffle, some business transaction — as well as certain shadier things which he preferred not to remember. Who lived in those houses now? What happened in those rooms? If he could at least have lived in another town. If only his youth which was also a thing of the past had not been bound up with this confounded port on the Black Sea! Fate had pinned him to this place, had crucified him in the very place of his past pleasures and errors. He might have gone to some other place in the country to find another job, just as humble perhaps, but at least free from the past. But now he had bound himself to this place hand and foot; bound himself in such a way, that he could not even dream of leaving it.

Somewhere Mamaia way there was a street which descended towards the sea. Somewhere under dilapidated walls, at the foot of the clayey cliff, where the night wind swept scraps of paper over the beach, the dark waves of the Black Sea clamoured. But the street was silent. It was paved with river stones which had taken on a greenish hue, perhaps through the sea and fog, and the air saturated with an invisible vapour; a greenish patina had even impregnated the plaster on the houses. Here, in Aristide Papapericlis Street (filo-Rumanian,

1840—1921), lived Spiru Vasiliu's new friend — one he had known for twenty years but with whom he had become intimate only a few months ago — Comrade Eftimie Zarifu, an under clerk at the Sovromtransport company, whom Spiru had known in his better days as rich Mr. Zarifu of the "Maritima Import—Export." It was only now that he visited his house, although he had passed by it any number of times in the past and had always felt a strange anxiety seeing it perched so dangerously on the edge of the cliff that was slowly crumbling into the sea. It seemed to him that the house, together with the whole corner of the cliff on which it was built might collapse any minute; that it would tumble over onto the narrow beach and into the sea. But the house stood there on the cracked cliff. Around it there was a garden with dusty, crooked, stunted trees. And in that garden, one summer the owner of the house had built a kind of pavilion of rushes and in it had placed a round table and wicker chairs. In a few days the rushes had faded and turned grey and ugly and had begun to break, ceaselessly covering the table and chairs — and perhaps even those who sat in their shade to drink malt coffee, and relish their sherbet — with dusty, grey, woody chips. The house was in harmony with the flaked plaster and the rusty balconies.

It was towards this house that, as soon as he had succeeded in getting away from the port and from under the director's gaze, Spiru Vasiliu set out, at a pace which was nearly a run. His heart beat fast and he experienced something which he had not felt for over twenty years. He was running, afraid of reaching the place too late.He had waited for this moment all day. Now finally he had arrived. The windows were lighted. He went into the entrance and up the stairs without observing that

the bulb of the electric light with its green tin shade, was yellow with dirt; and that the walls along the staircase had designs of an uncommon ugliness, as if they had been painted by an insane painter who had taken his brush across it by chance and then repeated the same senseless designs with bewildering consistency. Seized with a painful impatience Spiru Vasiliu rang the bell. After a minute a girl's voice behind the door asked:

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Angelica dear... Captain Vasiliu..."

The door opened and a girl appeared on the threshold. There was a strange beauty about her in her paleness — her skin was of a mellow, lustreless colour — in her big dark eyes and in her black hair, all glossy curls, as she stood in the dim light of the dirty bulb hanging over the staircase. She smiled at him with closed lips, and made room for him to enter. In the light within, one might have noted her square, stubborn forehead and rather heavy chin, her breasts that were too full and her rounded shoulders. She was quiet and sure of the admiration of Spiru Vasiliu who looked at her with liquid, confident eyes and tried to kiss her hand.

"No, leave that!... Please don't..." she said drawing her hand away. He was left standing with his hand in the air, still feeling in his palm the soft and fleshy little hand which had sent a shiver of voluptuousness running through him. But suddenly there was a sinking feeling in his heart — a feeling of fear. He followed Angelica into the room. The lamp, that hung from the ceiling with its embroidered shade with long tassels, spread a dim, soft light over the jumble of furniture (an old brown china cabinet dating from 1900, a black "cubist" table of 1930), over the wine and champagne glasses

each of a different kind that sparkled behind the glass door of the cabinet. The upper part of the wall, full of bad paintings — sailing-ships, lilac flower, head of an old Jew — remained in the shadow. On the table-cloth there were crumbs, a stemmed crystal glass, beautifully cut, upon which finger marks could be detected, and by the glass — a lonely shoehorn. Spiru Vasiliu stopped by the table and took the shoehorn in his trembling hand. He looked at it without seeing it and read without understanding what was written on it: *W. Hansen, Zapatero, Arenal 2411, Buenos Aires.* When he raised his head, Angelica, her back turned to him, was staring out of the window; everything outside was darkness, except for the stars glittering in the sky and phantastic white crests of foam swaying on the sea below. Spiru Vasiliu approached Angelica and murmured:

"Have you thought over what I told you yesterday?"

She nodded. With a clumsy movement, Spiru Vasiliu stretched out his arm to embrace her and fold her to his breast; but with unexpected sprightliness she bent quickly, passed under his arm and sat down on a sofa. Throughout this little scene, she was all seriousness.

Spiru Vasiliu felt downright ill. It was all so stupid, so meaningless. With awkward shyness he had declared his love for her in the proper form — a thing he had never done before; always his smile, a movement of his eyelids, or a firm pressure during a dance had served his purpose. He realized how naive, immature and artless Zarifu's daughter was, compared with the girl friends he, Spiru Vasiliu, had had in the past, and yet when he saw her face with that transparent, darkish, lustreless complexion, those oriental eyes and even the shape of her imperfect body, he trembled with desire.

He drew near her. Angelica looked at him without either admiration or fear, quite sure of herself. Spiru Vasiliu knelt by her arm-chair and put his arms around her.

"Give me your answer," he whispered ardently.

She spoke in a natural voice:

"To tell you frankly, I was flabbergasted at the beginning; then I thought it over... I really don't know what my feelings are..."

Spiru Vasiliu took a deep breath; an absurd, insane happiness overwhelmed him, and he experienced a feeling of immense gratitude:

"Thank you, Angelica," he whispered. "Let me only be allowed to love you." Then, with a trace of his old manners of a lady-killer, he smiled with complacency and calm self-satisfaction, which trembled on the verge of collapse, and went on:

"You'll love me too... It's destiny. It's inevitable !"

"It might be," the girl answered calmly. She was thoughtful for a while, then added with childish solemnity: "Maybe it's my destiny."

He was out of his mind with delight; still kneeling by her he tried to kiss her, but she drew away deftly, moving her head in such a way that Spiru Vasiliu could only kiss her cheek and her chin. However, he also kissed her on the throat. A tremor of excitement went through her, and she drew her head between her shoulders which made her look a bit hunchbacked. Spiru Vasiliu clenched his teeth, laying his head in her lap and murmuring in a smothered voice, as he rubbed his cheek against her skirt:

"Angelica... my beloved..."

She began to stroke his hair gently, very gently, though really she did not feel inclined to touch this man. She was moved, yes — but by pity, as she looked

at the back of his neck and saw two furrows across it, and his thinning hair; and she felt slightly sickened by the earthy colour of his head which his thin, sparse hair made visible. Was that Captain Spiru Vasiliu ? 'How strange, how strange !' she thought and gave a sigh. Then she began to tire. She was sorry — she did not know why.

The key turned in the lock and the door opened squeaking on its hinges. Spiru Vasiliu, who until then had remained with his eyes closed, his cheek against Angelica's rounded thighs, and lost in a kind of dark, soothing vacancy and oblivion, gave a start, jumped to his feet with one movement and began fumbling through his pockets with trembling fingers for his packet of cigarettes; and in that fragment of a minute Angelica had drawn away from under his head and gone to the other end of the sofa.

Mr. Zarifu came in. He mumbled something in a sour, discontented voice, without at first seeing them, and turned to lock the door on the inside. He stood outside the circle of light shed by the lamp that hung over the table. Angelica and Spiru Vasiliu could see his narrow shoulders, his thin neck, the bald patch upon his head and the shabby clothes covering his small, stunted-looking body, which had contracted, dwindled and wizened like Mr. Zarifu's fortune. Looking at him, Spiru Vasiliu felt that he, Spiru, was a broad-chested young man, that life was still endless, opening out wide before him, like the sea. He took in Angelica at a glance with her dark, velvety, lustreless complexion, her black, glossy hair and long, turned-up eyelashes, and suddenly felt giddy with her pure and sombre beauty as if he had drunk a glass of brandy on an empty stomach. He was young and happy; this scene had been repeated, heaven

knows how many times: the father or the husband returning home, a moment of embarrassment and suspicion, followed by Spiru's off-handed explanations. But oh, how happy he felt now!

Mr. Zarifu entered the circle of light. There was a deadly gloss about his bald patch and his forehead, both of an ivory yellow. Beneath them his face was pinched and wrinkled, drawn in, and hollow. Mr. Zarifu was a shrivelled shadow, an embittered and discontented little ghost. Under his arm he carried the well-worn briefcase of a small clerk. He laid it on the table and looked at Spiru Vasiliu as if he didn't know him and then, in the indifferent voice of a man who has neither wishes nor hopes or passions, and who has even given up his memories, said:

"Ah, it's you?"

He opened the briefcase, took out a pair of worn, black-satin oversleeves such as established clerks wear, and some papers, and, still standing with his back to the two young people, said:

"Angelica, have you had anything to eat?"

"I'm not hungry," Angelica murmured.

He turned and looked at her from under his eyebrows with his expressionless eyes, saying:

"Do eat. You must keep in good health."

Angelica shrugged her shoulders and asked in a whisper, so that only Spiru Vasiliu could hear:

"But why? Why should I keep in good health? What use is it to me?"

She rose and Spiru Vasiliu again felt dizzy at the sight of the graceful movement of her rather heavy body.

"What did you say?" Mr. Zarifu asked.

"Nothing. I'm going to bed." Then turning towards Spiru Vasiliu she added: "Please excuse me. *Bonsoir!*"

"But have you had your supper?" Mr. Zarifu asked vaguely.

"Yes, yes, I've had it," Angelica said and smiled winsomely at Spiru Vasiliu as if he were an accomplice, then left the room, swaying as she walked, like a sailing boat when the wind swells its sails.

A silence followed. Spiru Vasiliu felt pleased with himself. Mr. Zarifu sighed, standing motionless, his chin resting on his chest, then came and sat down on the sofa, in the place that Angelica had vacated. He asked unconcernedly:

"And how are you?"

Spiru Vasiliu shook his head:

"Those idiots have their knife in me... my job..."

Zarifu cut in: "I don't know, I don't know, I really don't know how long it'll last." He spoke as if to himself. "No, I don't know," and he gave a tired smile and rubbed his eyes with his hands. "Sometimes I admire you, Captain, how you can keep so... optimistic? What do you base your optimism on?" Mr. Zarifu asked turning red-rimmed, owlish eyes towards Spiru Vasiliu.

Spiru Vasiliu crossed his legs and smiled complacently. He did not see his worn and baggy trousers, his dirty socks and his down-at-heel shoes. He felt young, freshly shaven and perfumed as if he had just had a shower bath and was dressed in spotless linen and a dark-blue uniform with gold stripes on his sleeves. That moment he was Vasiliu, mate of the *Arabella Robertson.*

"And why shouldn't I be? A daring, energetic, resolute man can do anything — conquer anything!"

"You've always been a conqueror," Mr. Zarifu said sourly.

"So have you, sir," Spiru answered courteously. "I conquered the ladies and you did the same with money..."

Zarifu shook his head. "Vanity of vanities," he mumbled. "And neither of us has anything left..."

He got up and looked out of the window at the dark sea lost in the darkness of the night.

"No! I've nothing left."

"That doesn't matter!" Vasiliu exclaimed. "It doesn't matter! We'll win everything back!"

He felt the youthfulness in his voice, his tone, his cry. Yet something was wrong somewhere. Some twenty or more years ago, he had not realized that he was young — yet he was. The soldiers who have to defend lost positions feel what he now felt indistinctly. However, he didn't know that, didn't want to know.

"We'll win back everything, sir. We'll be free again, free to go wherever our heart prompts us and do what we like. I no longer want to philander. I want to settle down, have a home and children and give them a happy life and a good situation. And you'll be rich again and be able to provide Miss Angelica with a princely dowry, you'll be free to have your fun and live in ease and comfort in your old age — to die with a smile on your lips and a cheque-book in your pocket. Do you get me?" He leaned towards him to repeat: "A cheque-book!"

Zarifu smiled in disgust, although a light had come into his eyes.

"Rot... the devil will take us, Captain... A cheque-book indeed!"

"No, you're wrong!" Spiru Vasiliu exclaimed heatedly. "Only think what it would mean if we came into the zone of influence of those others once more. Ships in the port, banks, agencies! They'll need brokers, people

who know the lie of the land! Gold will shower on us, sir! You'll open your agency again! You'll contact your friends and restart business, all kinds of operations, and all kinds of coups!"

"I might do that," Zarifu said. He had revived somehow and his face had changed. He spoke drily, with concentrated and controlled passion. He clenched his weak jaws, as he said:

"I might. I've got my own reliable people. I'm related to the *Banque du Levant* of Marseilles. Keramopulo of Famagusta is second cousin to me. I know the Barons Eftimiu of Alexandria. I've got my men in Cyprus and Haifa, and an uncle in Piraeus. I know shipping agents in Algiers and Barcelona... and I have... Yes, I might, I might," he said with glowing eyes. Then his face darkened for a moment. "No, my uncle Seraphim of Piraeus died two years ago... I had forgotten that. If you don't write letters, you don't receive any and you lose your connections; it seems to you that people remain the same, but, damn it, they grow old, and die..."

"That doesn't matter!" Spiru Vasiliu exclaimed. "There are others, it's not men that count. It's the goods! Do I have to teach you that? You know better than myself, sir. The goods'll come and go through this port. We'll sell wheat and timber; we'll buy machines, manufactured goods, luxury articles — lipstick, yes, sir, lipstick!"

He smiled, showing his big white teeth. Zarifu also began to laugh, a weak, shaky laughter. They laughed, although they knew it was no joke. They had done all these things and others besides. They knew what they could do and how it could be done. Zarifu went up to the sideboard, unlocked a door, and took out a bottle and

two fat glasses with narrow opening. He poured out the liquor very carefully.

"Courvoisier 1920," he said.

Vasiliu took the glass between his palms to warm it. He smelt the light, alcoholic vapour given off by the brandy. Zarifu sat down at the table and looked at him. His wizened cheeks were slightly touched with red.

"I don't know what's come over me, sir," Vasiliu said. "Upon my honour I've spoken to no one about these things: they're my innermost dreams. And I wouldn't even dare to speak them aloud, because they mean so much. They're a capital in themselves !"

"You fool !" Zarifu laughed in a falsetto tone. "Do you think you're the only one to have thought such things?"

He looked at him paternally, although he was small and weak compared with Spiru, who was very presentable and twice as big as Zarifu.

"What do you think torments me, Spiru? What do you think I'm waiting for? There was a time when I sat at a table, as we sit now at this hour, and piled up heaps of gold coins ! Yes, I piled them up like this, like this !" With his dried-up fingers he was making strange passes, as if fondling little towers of gold on the table on which there was only a shoehorn and a rusty one at that.

"Gold, gold, pounds of it, maybe hundreds of pounds of it. But I'll have it again, I'll have it again !"

"We'll make it, sir," Spiru Vasiliu said. "And even though I have to steal a ship, I'll have one ! I'll bring over opium and hashish and pay it off in a few months. Courage alone is needed and a good stroke of business, just one ! Here's luck to you ! I drink to your health," he said, raising his glass.

Zarifu nodded gently. He was so intensely excited, so exalted by his desire, that he couldn't speak, just raised his glass and drained it. Then he leaned towards Spiru Vasiliu, with wide eyes:

"But do you know where the danger lies? In the others ! All of them ! I know them, see them, feel them ! Here, in Constantza, Papadopol and Michels and Vlădescu. And in Bucharest those others, dozens of them, hundreds, all waiting. They, too, Spiru, want what we want. They too count upon their connections, their rich relatives abroad, and take care of their gold and precious stones that they've buried somewhere. They too make plans. They're our worst enemies ! You'll see ! You don't know them: you were a young fool — sailing the sea, and running after women, content with your pay and some miserable bribe for some trifling piece of smuggling. But I know. I've handled money and I know those bandits ! We'll have to get in first ! Go at it with claws and teeth. Take the first places, conclude the first transactions and get the first customers ! I've wanted a younger man to work with for long. I'll teach you, train you, for so far you've only been a cock-of-the-walk with a cock's head, and only misery has shaken you a bit. You'll be my pupil. Good luck, Spiru !"

Later, after a long talk in a voice that became lower and lower and when the whole bottle of brandy had been drunk, Vasiliu left. Angelica lay in her bed, open-eyed in the dark. She could not sleep. She felt an impulse to laugh, yet was troubled and uneasy — troubled by Spiru Vasiliu's passionate behaviour and embarrassed on account of his age, and of something which was at variance with her, which repelled her and made her want to have nothing to do with him. The fact that they were both in the adjoining room murmuring and

whispering, and kept the light on, agitated her. Then she heard the guest leaving and her father walking and pottering about in the next room, after which her door opened gently.

"Angelica, are you asleep?" Mr. Zarifu asked in a whisper.

Angelica felt irritated; she hesitated for a moment wondering if she should feign sleep. Nevertheless she murmured in a voice in which there was a pretence at drowsiness:

"What is it?"

"I've been talking with Spiru," Zarifu said in a low voice. "That man has fine prospects."

He stopped. Angelica did not answer.

"Very fine prospects," her father repeated, then closed the door, again began to potter about the room next to Angelica's and finally put out the light. The springs of the couch could he heard creaking as he lay on it, and also his sigh before falling asleep.

Angelica, however, could not sleep, but lay, her round, fresh arms under her head. 'A man of fine prospects.' And that earthen-coloured skin that his baldness disclosed? Suddenly she turned to one side and began to cry, her face buried in her pillow.

At that moment, Spiru Vasiliu, who had not gone home, but instead had walked about the deserted town, above the flood-lit, smoke-engulfed port to clear his mind of the drink, stopped above the casino and stood looking at the sea. He could hear the continuous rush of the waves and their impact on the breakwaters below. It was pitch dark over the sea. There was nothing to be seen beyond the coloured flare of the lighthouses. Dark waters, an opaque, cloudy night. But his dreams were dazzling. They had gone to his head and he had also made

Zarifu dizzy with them. Would he be able to make them come true? Was it possible? And when? What year? There were not so many years left to them. In what world? There were few signs, hardly any, Spiru Vasiliu kept telling himself. Sparse snowflakes were falling, and a cold wind blowing from the sea caused the flags that could not be seen in the darkness to flutter and flap.

XVIII

The *October Star* had been launched at Lübeck in 1902. She had shipped coal to the North Sea, general cargo to the Mediterranean and the shores of Africa, coal again to the China seas, and sometimes armament and ammunition instead of coal. She had changed her name and pavilion according to the shipowners or companies that had bought her; had been named *Theodora, Punta del Gada, Störte Becker* and many other names in the half century of her existence. She had floated on the cold, grey waters of the North Sea, on the azure waters of the Mediterranean, saltier than most other seas; on the blue oceanic waters and now on the dark, troubled, greyish-green, sweeter waters of the Black Sea, on which willow logs, uprooted from the Danube Delta and borne by the currents, sometimes floated hundreds of miles out.

Her engines stilled, the *October Star* was drifting slowly at the mercy of the currents off the Dobrujan coast. From the fishing cutters that were towing brigades of flat-bottomed fishing-boats which surrounded her as far as the eye could reach, sullen, bored men at the engines, annoyed on account of their small pay, watched her floating on the horizon, as if suspended in

the air, over the smooth, blue, translucent sea. Beyond that blue, there was a duller streak of whitish brilliance — the lower fringes of the sky; and above this floated the blue silhouette of the *October Star* letting out a cloud of smoke through her funnels for the guidance of the brigades. Despite the dazzling sunlight and the pure serenity of the sky, there was an air of secrecy, of isolation about the whole scene, as if somewhere on an unknown sea that motionless vessel signalled with its smoke to craft engaged in secret pursuits.

But their pursuit consisted only in the fishing of cod and sturgeon, ray and young sharks which swim through the miry valleys and shell-strewn plains at the bottom of the Black Sea. The catch had been satisfactory in the first days (there were shoals of cod in those parts, and the bottom of the sea was simply covered with ray); and some of the brigades had already fulfilled a month's norm. And among these there were a few who no longer wanted to work; the crews of two or three fishing-boats spoke of returning to shore. Emelian Romanov himself, a famous open sea fisherman and head of the front-rank brigade, had ceased working and was being towed to the ship.

It was morning and the few clouds that were there disintegrated over the sea. The sky was blue, and the calm sea undulated towards the horizon where it turned a lighter blue, nearly white with a translucent sheen. The motor-cutter gave off merry snorts as it let out its smoke over the clear water; it leapt over the waves beating up foam and swaying slightly, restlessly, describing short arcs in the air with the top of its mast. Sprawling on one side at the bottom of the boat, his hands under his head, Emelian Romanov looked at the cutter which towed them and at the white hempen cable which

sometimes fell into the water, then stretched out again, cracking like a whip and splashing on all sides, and he also looked at Cosma, the bulky giant with arms that were thicker and more powerful than those of any normal man. Cosma was sharpening the steel point of the fishing-hook with a file. Emelian turned towards the other boat and roared:

"Iermolai !"

A round, red head on a thick neck raised itself over the side of the other boat:

"Eh, there !"

"Iermolai, aren't you dry?"

The head disappeared without giving an answer.

Emelian laughed, cast another glance westward and then towards the open sea. To the west, a low, prolonged strip of yellow sand stretched below the horizon; sedge huts could be seen, as if emerging from the sea. Then they too disappeared. Along the whitish horizon in the open sea, the *October Star* was floating, a grey shadow seemingly suspended in [illegible]-air with the structure of her masts and sheers above it and letting out a motionless column of smoke in the shape of a mushroom. Everything was so bright, the sea sparkled so brilliantly, the air was so pure and clear that Emelian took his cap from his grey tousled head, swung it in the air, stretched himself in delight, then laid the cap on his nose and fell asleep.

The engines slowed down and finally stopped altogether. Above them towered a high wall of iron sheeting: the side of the ship. High up, their elbows resting on the rail, the crew looked down on them. All around, other cutters and other boats swayed to and fro on the gentle, rounded, translucent waves. The men at the engines with brawny, sunburnt bodies, called to one another from

their respective cutters. Standing in their boats, the fishermen recognized their friends from Mangalia or Sfîntu Gheorghe.

"Suleiman, how goes it? Tifon! You here, man? What you been at? Had a good catch?"

Suleiman, a thinnish fisherman, tightly girt with a woollen belt, rolled his white eyes in his dark face and showed his teeth:

"I caught the devil!" he laughed.

"That's a good thing!" Emelian roared merrily. Now, smoke him and eat him! And you, Toader, how was your catch today?"

Emelian stood in the bows of the boat, his arms akimbo and his cap pushed to the back of his head, pitching and rolling with the boat as it was swung by the waves. He threw a word to every one within a distance of two hundred yards which no one else could have done. But his lungs were good enough for it. Suddenly, however, he stopped short in his conversation with a man from Sfîntu Gheorghe, and stood as if petrified, staring hard. Some four or five barefooted men, three of whom were naked to the waist and deeply sunburnt, were climbing the rope-ladder. One of them was well known to Emelian. Who else could have such broad shoulders? Who else could be such a lump and yet go so quickly up the rope-ladder, like a bear climbing a tree? Seized by a mighty agitation, Emelian jumped into the bottom of the boat:

"Cosma! Ship the oars! Quick!"

The young man looked at him in surprise. The sharpened hook shone at his foot. And now he was sharpening a long knife and would have preferred not to be disturbed until he had made it as sharp as a razor.

"Come on, come on, after Iermolai!"

With a patient smile, the lad shipped the oars and pulled away (one had to give in to Uncle Emelian; he had his own strange whims like anyone: for instance he'd got Iermolai on the brain...). Bringing the boat close up to three others tied to one another, they went up the ladder after Iermolai. A little behind their boat, drawn lengthwise, were other boats washed by the unceasing flow from the side of the ship.

The deck was crowded with loquacious fishermen, with workers: men and women of the tinning factory; and sailors in shorts with tattooed arms. From all over the place they emerged looking for someone or other and shouting "Marinică !" or some such name, then, receiving no answer, turned on their heels and disappeared into the depth of the ship or went up to one of the higher decks.

In the midst of a group Iermolai was talking to Pricop who held a book under his arm. The title of the book was: *Works* by J. V. Stalin. All around him the fishermen were laughing. Emelian and Cosma drew near.

"Comrade chairman !" Iermolai was saying. "It's here I hold you, right here, in my heart !" And he struck himself across the chest with his heavy palm. His chest gave a deep sound. "In my heart ! Come here that I may embrace you, brother !"

Pricop, however, drew aside speaking solemnly but kindly:

"As if it was such a great thing. That's my duty. The people have chosen me chairman of the union, which means that I must take care how the comrades live and work. Isn't that right?"

"Of course it is," the men were saying as they looked at one another. "He's a smart one, Pricop is, and he's right. There's no denying it, he's right."

"So I said to the store-keeper: if we're well provided why shouldn't the men be served? There are hundreds of bottles down there, so why must they drink water? They risk their lives for the people, Comrades!"

The men agreed: the chairman was right again. Pricop spoke quietly and with determination. A decent chap, Pricop. Emelian Romanov, however, had not ingered to listen to him. He had followed Iermolai. Squarely built Iermolai, swinging as he walked, was making his way surreptitiously towards the poop. Emelian was signalling to those around him: "After me, boys! You'll see something!" There was a merry glint in his eyes as he followed in Iermolai's footsteps, his bare feet treading the iron sheets which the sunshine had heated. The fishermen followed him to watch the fun.

The store-room was at the poop under the quarter deck; it was rather dark there and there was not much room; all around high shelves could be seen laden with tins, pots of jam, sugar and biscuit boxes, and a little to one side, hundreds of bottles with drinks of every colour: white, green, yellow and orange. The pinched store-keeper with his shaven pate never seemed to notice what was happening around him. He was a great friend of Pricop's, the "comrade chairman." Iermolai stood with his back against the shelves packed with bottles. He had seen Emelian and the others and pretended that he was just looking at the labels on the boxes. The store-keeper thought Iermolai wanted to buy something and asked:

"Do you want to buy some shaving soap, Comrade?"

Iermolai shrugged his shoulders. No, he didn't want shaving soap. But he looked hard and with a dignified air at a box of biscuits. Emelian nudged the others and was hardly able to control his laughter.

"Biscuits, is it? Or some tinned vegetables, sweets or something else?"

Iermolai recoiled as if he felt suddenly sick. Sweets, indeed! That was a good one! No, he didn't want sweets either!

"A lamp chimney, then?"

Emelian let out a stifled roar and darted out of the room, the fishermen on his heels. In the sunlight outside, close to the hatch on which a pile of onions and one of coal were spread, Emelian rolled with laughter. But suddenly he listened attentively. Iermolai was making himself heard. He was offended and letting the store-keeper know of it.

"Say, brother, is that what you give a high sea fisherman? Shaving soap? Lamp chimneys? And what am I to do with 'em? Eat 'em? You'll offer me syrup next."

"Oh, we've got syrup, too, " the store-keeper answered.

Outside, Emelian was enjoying the fun. "Listen to him, lads, what a fool the man is!"

"Syrup indeed!" Iermolai burst out indignantly. "Drink your syrup yourself, Comrade, and give me brandy, the strong kind too."

There was silence for a time, then the sound of a cork being drawn, and then a gurgle as Iermolai gulped down his drink. Later Iermolai was heard blowing out his breath to cool his throat.

"Haaah, ha!"

At that moment Emelian entered and asked innocently:

"Well, have you bought the lamp chimney?"

An uproarious mirth followed and a hail of heavy blows upon Iermolai's back! Emelian was doubled up

with laughter, his face turned a fiery red and he seemed ready to burst. He called all the fishermen to witness:

"You've seen, my lads, haven't you? And just as I told you, Iermolai, pass me that lamp chimney, it's rather smoky!" And Iermolai passed it to him, though not before taking another gulp and breathing like a whale:

"Haaah, ha!..."

XIX

On one of the early days, when Emelian Romanov's brigade brought their catch to the mother-ship, Cosma going up on deck found himself looking into the eyes of a girl dressed in an overall all stained with tomato juice and with her hair gathered under a red kerchief from which a few fair locks peeped out. Slim, with her wasp-like waist girded with the belt of her overall, and with her golden hair and complexion, she reminded one of a wasp. She put on a daring, cheeky smile and her eyes were large and green and clear, and deep like frozen water. Looking into those eyes Cosma felt as if he had fallen over the rail into the cold, green depth of the sea. For a moment he stood there bewildered. A cowherd who had lived a life of loneliness, a life of a savage in the sedges of the Danube backwaters, he could never have imagined that anything like those eyes existed, anything like the face of that girl of eighteen. There was in those green eyes, as they looked at him, surprise and a secret question which the girl herself was not aware of. The whole thing lasted but a moment, then the girl gave a laugh, turned on her heels and went to get on with her work, while Cosma stood there giddy with it all, so that Emelian had to take him by the shoulder and swear

at him in his thick voice, to make him resume his fish weighing.

Before many days had elapsed, Cosma had entered into conversation with the girl, had learned that she was called Margarita — Margarita Chivu; and also what she was doing on board ship: she was working in the tinned-fish factory.

But he had spoken little to her. Once they had stood watching the night fall: the gathering shadows of the warm, velvety evening, with the sea turning a rosy colour followed by a deep lilac. Cosma had held Margarita by the hand and both had been silent. Then Cosma again went out fishing and for whole days and nights he pulled at the oars and rarely answered, or answered irrelevantly, the tales and jokes told by Emelian, who did not know that at that moment Cosma, in thought, had Margarita sitting by him on the seat.

And while the others of the brigade snored noisily in the cutter's hold, rolling over one another without waking when some bigger wave pitched the boat more violently, Cosma lay thinking of the girl on board ship who, perhaps at that moment, was on night shift, working in the steam of cod prepared in tomato sauce, in the heat impregnated with the smell of fried onions and fried fish, and in the deafening roar of the machines that closed the tins. Gazing into the serene sky, noting the greenish brilliance of the constellations, and especially the evening star and Sirius, he thought of her, while the wind whistled everlastingly and the sea roared its incessant roar, as numberless young fishermen whom he neither knew nor cared about had thought of their love. And after such nights, alone, with the moon in a green sky, and the stars that were reflected in a sea the colour of dark wormwood leaves, Cosma would set to work

early in the morning feeling no fatigue, and the days would go by him without disturbing his dream, leaving him as if under a spell.

Walking now on the oily, iron-covered deck, he was in quest of Margarita. Nobody would have suspected him of being in quest of anyone. Nobody even took notice of him. And this because he wanted to be left alone. Feigning unconcern, he walked like an athlete hewn and fashioned out of stone, who had stepped down from his pedestal. But he was flesh and bone all right — of firm flesh and thick bones covered by clothes that were too tight and too short for him. His navel could be seen between his old trousers and vest which was split under the arms. He walked slowly, his hands in his pockets, and turning his tousled head to look about him — that head with its unshaven cheeks and clear-cut, beautiful, smooth features that was set upon a neck so thick and muscular that no collar could encompass it. Margarita was nowhere to be seen. A shaggy dog barked in the doorway of the kitchen. Two fishermen were drinking water from the poop's pump — one of them had appeared from somewhere on the sea, springing suddenly over the rail after having shouted two short pornographic words in Turkish. Confused shouts came in answer; there was the noise of engines, and the swaying masts of the cutters could be seen a little higher than the deck of the *October Star.*

All around were the boundless sea and the blue sky and flights of sea-gulls with their hoarse cries like the noise of rusty iron; and the wind blew without cessation. Cosma pretended to look about him with unconcern. No, he would not find her here. It would be the fore deck then. Was she working, was she in the factory? No, there she was !

Still in her overalls, with her trousers rolled up to her knees, Margarita was washing the deck with a hose. Cosma drew near smiling, and called out:

"Hi, Margarita, what yer doing there?"

"Out of the way!" the girl shouted. "Out of the way or I'll turn the hose on you."

Cosma laughed and walked right in the way of the gushing hose, held his hand over the opening and sprayed the girl, not without getting drenched through first. Then he took the hose and began watering the deck.

"Is that how you welcome me? With a cold shower?"

"Yes! Just like that, and why not!" she laughed. She laughed loudly, but her big green eyes in which there was no laughter, looked questioningly at him.

Cosma pretended to threaten her: "Hi, come off it," he said. "Is that what I deserve? Now just you think a bit before speaking: the hose is in my hands now!"

"It's what you deserve," the girl said, without laughing this time.

Cosma opened his eyes wide and forgot his intention of punishing her. What had come over her?

"What's the matter?" he asked, his face darkening. "Have you changed?"

"Maybe..." she laughed defiantly.

He took her by the arm:

"Come over here..."

And he drew her to one side towards the rail, turning off the water tap as he went.

"What?" the girl asked, "d'you want me to tell you in what way I've changed? That I won't do for anything!"

Cosma's mind grew confused when he felt her so near and heard her laugh... but he pulled himself together and asked:

"And... why've you changed?"

She no longer looked at him now; her eyes were downcast. She thought of what she alone knew; saw something that only she knew about. In a moment, all the joy which had accompanied the man on his way to the ship oozed out of him. What had happened to the girl? She was changed; altogether changed. Did she know something he did not know and never could know? What strange behaviour was that?

"And if I've changed, aren't I allowed to, aren't I free?" she asked defying him.

He did not want to answer her right away. Why should he quarrel with her? It would be better to tame her. He took her by the shoulders and turned her towards the sea:

"Look there... I'll show you something... He pointed to the sea below. "Can you see? Do you remember when we saw a shoal of blue herrings pass?"

Below, in the tall shadow of the ship, living arrows pierced the sea. Dark slender backs darted with lightning speed; and the silvery shine of a fish's belly was also sometimes seen. They swam at every depth, in every direction; a silent mass, though more alive than anything else; a restless press of elongated forms, with quick, unexpected movements... Sometimes they seemed to have disappeared and you no longer saw them; it was as if the dark green waters with deeper shadows towards the depths had been deserted; then, without a moment's notice, you realized that a myriad of fish were again passing under your eyes on their journey through the cold layers of sea water.

Pointing out this sight to the girl and remembering how he had stood with her as they were standing now looking at that other shoal of migratory herrings not so

long ago, confusion overtook him and his heart melted with tenderness. He would have liked to hold Margarita to him and tried to do so. But she drew a step backward:

"You're a smart fellow, aren't you? You show me blue herrings and then you want quite a different thing !"

Cosma stood for a moment motionless and dumb, after which he spoke with difficulty:

"So...you — have changed !"

"Changed !" she exclaimed defiantly. "Did I promise you anything then? We just talked. Can't a girl be friendly, without you thinking all kinds of silly things?"

"I... I didn't think of anything wrong," Cosma mumbled, "I wanted to... " She cut him short:

"Yes, but I don't want to; d'you want to force me?"

She was hard, hostile — a stranger. 'What could have happened to her?' Cosma asked himself in a daze. The girl turned and made for the factory, calling to another girl as she went:

"Come on, Vasilica, the onions have come and the men don't know where to unload them !"

Cosma stood for a long time as if rooted to the spot, then he forced himself to move, and made his way towards the store-room with a bowed head. Astonished by the change in him, Emelian Romanov asked:

"What's up, me lad?"

"Nothing. Comrade store-keeper give us a stiff one !"

The men around him were talking and laughing loudly and clinking glasses. Iermolai could no longer speak articulately. Emelian, his cheeks a fiery red, was arguing with Gheorghe Luca:

"And why shouldn't I have another?"

"Because you must go to the meeting."

"And ye think I'll be fuddled, do ye? Ha! It'd take brandy stronger than this to do that!"

"That's a boast, Emelian, a boast, and I'll have to stand up for you again at the meeting!" Luca Gheorghe answered, frowning and displeased.

"And now here's this kid taking to it too!"

"What yer picking on me for, fellow?" Cosma asked lowering, like a storm. "Ain't I free to do what I want?"

"D'ye call getting drunk being free?" the other answered. "The devil take your store-room, comrade store-keeper! It's a pub as we had in former days at our place in Danilofca!"

The store-keeper answered:

"If you don't like it, don't drink!"

"I'm not going to, but these grey-haired children do!"

"Go to the trade union, go to the Party!" the store-keeper answered jeeringly with an insolent look.

Iermolai heard it all and, with his fist that could have knocked down an ox, he struck himself on the chest:

"President... ? Trade union? that's where they all are, in my heart! Yes, in my heart."

His back turned to them, Cosma drank on steadily. When he felt that he could no longer stand, he walked down to a big coil of cable and, dropping on it, fell asleep and slept like a log.

In the evening when he awoke, his head was swimming and sharp pains were shooting through it. Looking around him, his eyes still heavy with the sleep of drunkenness, he heard music and laughter. Sitting on the hatch, one of the sailors was playing the accordion, while two or three couples were dancing. The girls were from among the factory workers. Two of them — Mar-

garita and another — were still in their overalls, with their trousers rolled up. Margarita was dancing with Lae, the helmsman, whose thick, curly hair and the hair growing on his cheeks, made a head-dress a span high. The accordion player did not know a single piece to the end. When he couldn't go on with the old piece he began another and then another and another, leaving everyone half finished. The dancers stopped, all muddled, and shouted:

"Hey, fathead? What are you doing with that accordion if you can't manage it?"

Margarita and Lae alone danced to every tune with complete unconcern and one of the spectators shouted in admiration:

"Look at him, fellows ! Lae's a dancer and no mistake ! He just changes from one dance to the other in one step. Bravo Margarita, good luck to you !"

Cosma stood as if petrified. Once his eyes met the girl's and she looked at him with the same secret questioning that he could not fathom. He rose and went back to the store-room for a few more drinks. Now he understood how the change had come about.

He had seen her laughing with Lae, allowing him to hold her in his arms. And when he realized this he suddenly dashed the glass against the wall, breaking it to smithereens.

"Hi, there, what's come over you, Comrade ?" the store-keeper shouted. You'll have to pay for that glass. They're simply wild when they get drunk, these people..."

XX

Two days later, they were still on board. The captain and Nicolau had finally convinced them to meet

and discuss where the next fishing should be. The men had accepted out of sheer boredom. They were idle on board: some of them hardly quitted the store-room. Iermolai could no longer stand, while Emelian, never affected by the liquor he imbibed, laughed more merrily than ever. Others sat in their boats, cutting slices out of big, round loaves and munching away leisurely as they said their 'say. The mechanics on the cutters bathed in the sea, washed the decks, or played backgammon. And everything was quiet and over everything shone the sun, the whole atmosphere being permeated with a kind of stupid sloth and light-heartedness. Here and there, a man would worry and speak heatedly with other fishermen:

"What are we supposed to be doing? How long are we staying on here? Here's another day lost !"

Emelian Romanov came out of the store-room and, with a voice overloud and overgay, shouted:

"Hi, pals ! and when are we leaving?"

He took Iermolai by the arm and the two went to the captain and asked the same thing; the latter answered sharply, with the anger of impotence:

"You want to know where you'll fish next? Well, we can't get together to discuss the matter because Comrade Preţiosu has another meeting which we can't get him to wind up..."

"Then that'll mean another day wasted, Comrade !" Emelian shouted, with unjustifiable satisfaction in his words.

"Yes, another day. What is there to be pleased about?"

Emelian's eyes grew wide:

"I'm not pleased, Cap'n ! No fisherman is... You think we are because we're boozing? Well, we booze

because there's nothing else to do, Comrade Cap'n... Come on, say the word, Captain..."

"How can I, man?" the captain answered visibly worried. "Comrade Preţiosu must be present when we discuss any undertaking."

The fishermen shrugged their shoulders. Well, if things were like that, there was no help for it... And they went to have another drink.

In the evening the men in charge of the brigades, Emelian and Iermolai among others, met in the presence of the captain and Preţiosu. There were some fifty men of every kind and age, dark-haired or with hair the colour of ripe corn, bearded or clean-shaven, with eyes like a calm sea, eyes like the sea when the wind sweeps over it, and clear, hazel eyes. Yes, every kind, even one with dripping clothes as if he'd just been fished out of the water — and that was Iermolai himself. The captain raised his eyebrows:

"What's happened, Comrade Iermolai?"

Iermolai's eyes were glassy and he spoke somewhat dejectedly:

"I got... rather wet... the hose was..."

Without further questioning the captain went on to speak. In his corner Emelian Romanov was enjoying himself. He knew that Iermolai had had to be taken to the pump and held under it forcibly by four men, to bring him to his senses. He, Emelian, had had no need of that: drink never went to his head. Now he was listening attentively to what the captain was saying and was wondering as he looked at him why the man seemed so bitter. He concealed his feelings well, but not well enough to conceal them from Emelian Romanov, who had seen a great deal and was no fool, no, not even when he'd been drinking...

"...and considering the importance of this fleet's production for our people, Comrades," — the captain was saying —"we should start a socialist emulation drive between the brigades..."

The men looked at each other. A fair-haired fellow with a short beard the colour of ripe corn raised his hand. Emelian Romanov blinked: 'Aha, the Communists are always first in such things. This one, Luca Gheorghe by name, is always ahead of everyone. Only wait and see if you'll get ahead of an old sea dog like Emelian Romanov.'

"Comrades," Luca Gheorghe was saying, "I and my brigade'll turn out two norms on this trip."

Romanov spoke too:

"I challenge him and'll exceed the norm by 120 per cent!"

"Well done," the captain said, as darkly as before. "Who else will speak?"

After the captain had put down the pledges on a sheet of paper, Preţiosu, who had stood motionless at the corner of the table, his cigarette sticking to his lip, and blinking to keep the smoke from his eyes, began to speak:

"Comrades," he said rather through his nose, "this emulation drive must show the consciousness of our collective, it must show that we are building Socialism, that we are working for the people! That we love the people, Comrades!"

"Yes, yes!" Emelian Romanov agreed.

"And, Comrades, this emulation drive must not remain on paper! It must be an actual fact and the results must be palpable!"

Emelian asked inquisitively:

"Yes, but how?"

"One moment, Comrade; you'll take the floor after this. Comrades, we are building Socialism..."

And in this way he went on drawing things out lengthily as was his habit. The captain seemed more despondent than ever. Emelian listened and understood little. 'Perhaps I'm dull or I can't stand drink as I could once,' he was thinking. 'That's bad. When you can't stand your liquor, you must give up drinking...'

However, in the end, he couldn't prevent himself from asking: "But what about the emulation, Comrade?"

"The emulation drive," Preţiosu answered, "must be a concrete thing and not merely a record on paper; it is a method, Comrade..."

It was then that the voice of Luca Gheorghe, the fellow with the fair beard, was heard again:

"Emelian is asking how we are going to check it, Comrade... that is, how we can keep this emulation from dying..."

"Oh, that mustn't be on any account!" Preţiosu answered.

"Of course not, we know that it mustn't, and we don't want it to; but how are we to do it?"

"The results will be posted up at the end of the month; there will be an honours table; is there any other question?"

Preţiosu's tone had made it plain to anyone that there should be none. They rose and left the wardroom with its red plush chairs where the meeting had been held, crowding at the door. A breeze came through the port-holes, fluttering the curtains.

As they were separating, Emelian asked Luca Gheorghe:

"Can you tell me, lad, how things are with the emulation drive? What did he want to say?"

"Well, I don't know very well myself. But we'll go ahead and do our own reckoning. What he does, that's his affair."

"Have you a notebook?" Emelian asked by way of an answer.

"I have."

"So've I. Then we'll keep count and see who'll do the trick !"

"We'll see !"

They said the last words as they descended the rope-ladder together. It was night. One the of ship's searchlights revealed a gently heaving sea the colour of green poison. Outside this circle of light was intense darkness.

Emelian jumped into his boat:

"Come on, me lads. We're going." And he roared towards the cutter: "Start her up, Ghiță !"

One of the fellows asked from the bottom of the next boat:

"How was it?"

Emelian told him, dwelling more particularly on certain things that had puzzled him: "And the captain? What's up with him? He was like a wet rag. And what did Prețiosu want with that emulation drive?"

From the third boat Iermolai's gruff voice was heard growling:

"So many days lost and for nothing; and all of us swilling like swine..."

"It's a fact you were !" Emelian shouted cantankerously. "Now what the devil's up with this one now? Is he asleep?" he asked pointing towards Cosma who was stretched out at the bottom of the boat.

"No... Don't know what's up with him, perhaps he's ill... " mumbled the fisherman he had addressed.

"I'm not," Cosma answered curtly.

"Then, get hold of the oars!" Emelian ordered. But Cosma only turned to one side without raising an eyelid. The other fisherman whispered:

"Leave him alone. There's something wrong with him... I don't know what..."

"That's a good one. Something's wrong, is there?" Emelian shipped the oars and pushed against the iron side of the ship: they had to get away.

As he began rowing, he heard Iermolai say:

"They swill themselves like swine instead of working..."

'There, he's not got over it yet,' Emelian thought. 'He's one of the best but look what state he is in...' And then, as he rowed, he asked himself: 'What the devil is the matter with us all?' He felt worried, despondent and angry, but didn't properly understand what was happening. What was to be done?

Ghiță, on the cutter, gave them a towing cable. The cutter sailed away into the darkness trailing their boat and another two. The lights of the *October Star* were soon left far behind and two hours later they had disappeared beyond the horizon. Emelian sat listening to the rippling water, the wind touching his rough face which was beginning to grow old. He was a cute, clever man, with a clear head. He never felt at ease when he did not understand what was happening. And now Cosma was lying at his feet without being sick; a whole day had been lost for a meeting which had left him more in the dark than before; the men were discontented, veiled threats had been uttered, it was as if there was something wrong with the whole fleet, as if it was diseased. What did it all mean? 'Things are darker than the pitch darkness out here,' Emelian was thinking sitting there

on his seat, his hands on his knees, the water all round swashing and rippling. A star fell from the sky in the darkness towards the north and went out.

'That one fell into the sea,' Emelian thought. 'Let it,' he added maliciously. And, to get some relief, he swore inwardly at the falling star.

XXI

Whilst the boats were on their way towards all the points of the horizon, when on all the cutters the tired helmsmen were straining their eyes to see through the dark — the faintly lighted dial of the compass showing them the direction of their route — everything had become quiet on board ship; and, except for the men on watch in the signal room and at the engines, everybody was asleep.

Up in the signal room, Nicolau, his hair all roughened, a cigarette in the corner of his mouth, was showing Constantin, the second mate, something on the chart:

"Look, we've gone out of our course during the day to here. The currents are strong, although there's not been much wind. Now two hours' sail at forty-five degrees should bring you here. That's all."

Prodan stood motionless at the helm, his back to the wall, waiting to start. Nicolau said good night and went down the steps.

✦

Constantin, the officer on watch, stood, with his elbows on the tall wooden rail of the watch deck, looking through his glasses and trying to discover cutter N° 301 to the north-west. At first there had been in that

direction only a purple-coloured expanse, a shimmering of lilac-coloured shadows as in a dream, beneath which shone a pale, nearly white, green-blue sea endlessly giving off oily, metallic glints, melting into those velvety purple shadows along the horizon. The watch passed slowly, hour after hour. They were seeking the cutter which was too far away, and calculating the angle of derivation of the ship which floated motionless on the waters... Everything was silent. At the helm Prodan stood leaning against the white wall of the signal room, quite still, as if made of stone. All around there was the wide, endless, open sea moving sleepily; upon it was the ship with her several floors, her machines, her factory, cabins and decks; near her, long black arrows could be seen faintly on the water—the boats that had brought fish to the factory. On the fore deck the steel winches rumbled from time to time, and shouts were heard — signs that another brigade had come to unload their fish. But all these noises seemed to be remote; they came from below, were faint and without any power. Power, instead, was in the terrible, widespread calm of the sea.

The last lilac-coloured flickers of the twilight disappeared to the north-west. Their light was so mellow that Constantin seemed dissatisfied there was no fragrance to it; such a horizon should have smelt of spices and gardens in bloom. But the only smell that assailed his nostrils was of fried fish, fish oil and sauce coming in unbroken waves from the tinned-fish factory below the fore deck. Constantin was used to this smell, but tonight it seemed to him that soft, balmy breezes with a fragrance of lilac and petunia should have been wafted over the sea... His imagination, however, was of no avail, everything smelt of fried fish — of fried fish and sauce.

Somebody came up the iron steps and stood by him without speaking. Constantin kept his eyes glued to his glasses, moving them slowly, millimetre by millimetre, from left to right and back again. He stopped in the middle of the arc he had made and remained motionless.

"Have you found her?" asked the man who stood by him.

It was the captain's voice. Constantin lowered his glasses and raised his eyes to Captain Haralamb, who, tall and stooping a little, was also seeking the cutter's little light. His lips were pressed tight like those of an irritated and angry man. He seemed tired. At other times he would never have allowed his shoulders to droop.

He spoke again drily, curtly:

"Anything else?"

"Nothing," the young man answered. "At eleven, I'll set her going for a two hours' sail at 45 degrees."

The captain muttered something, turned his back on him, passed through the signal room and came out at the other side of the watch deck. Constantin could see his broad back under his white shirt. The captain looked at the sky and the sea, returned into the signal room, and leant towards the barometer on the wall: his white hair and blue eyes pierced the darkness for a moment. The captain sighed, passed by Constantin without a word and started on his way downstairs disappearing into the obscurity. The young man remained scanning the sky, his elbows resting on the rail. Above the sea, the huge square of the Pegasus floated like a green gem in fiery waters. The little position lights of the cutters studded the horizon. He thought he heard somebody laugh or call out below on the aft deck. And there seemed to be

music too... But maybe it was all an illusion. The sea heaved deeply, sleepily, gently, and the night was pure and calm... Constantin wrung his clammy hands. He would have liked to run away and leave this motionless ship where... Oh, it was the people, the people who spoiled everything! They could make everything so beautiful, so good, and then it was they who...

Darkness lay over all the decks. The faint noises that could be heard might have been the swell of the waves as they broke against the ship's sides, or the breath of a dolphin. A star fell, cutting across Pegasus. Then another, more distant and lower down. Their silent glide across the vault of heaven intensified the silence. Constantin felt his heart beating, heard the ticking of the chronometer in the signal room.

On this endless silence an altogether unexpected sound fell: the chirping of a bird. Constantin turned and saw a shadow cross the captain's deck. From there the chirping had come. Breathing with difficulty, the shadow began to climb the stairs. Again the sound was heard.

"Phew, phew, phee! tew, tew, tee!"

He was an old, unwieldy man, with hair cropped close — a white silvery brush of hair around a bald patch as if of old ivory. He was in overalls — the kind which form a sort of bib over the chest, leaving the back and arms uncovered. The back and arms of the newcomer were bare. It was plain that he had been a sturdy fellow in his time but now he was old. His face was the face of an old man who knows a great deal. In the streak of light issuing from the door of the signal room, his distorted mouth could be seen: this man had seen many shady things in his life and sarcasm, disappointment and bitterness had left a perpetual twist on his mouth. He

leant over the second mate and patted him on the shoulder: "Eh, son!... tew, tew, tee..."

The young man did not answer. The old man looked about him over the sea, then at the sky, and sighed:

"I can't sleep..."

Rounded waves glided lazily. Everything was silent, the ship seemed to be floating on air. The old man murmured:

"Such a night we had in the Maracaibo lagoon... Only the shores were near... shores with black, still forests; no leaves stirring; no movement anywhere, no noise. We were on board a tanker of the Socony Company, creeping along the edge of the forest — a pilot taking us in. We no longer spoke; the silence was too great. The engines hardly throbbed; the deck vibrated under us, but also in silence. The only sound came from the swell caused by our boat, breaking somewhere in the dark about a mile off. At last the lights came on. Thousands and thousands of lights upon the waters: the oil derricks of Maracaibo. There are many derricks in the lagoon and more in the forest; and all with reflectors and lights everywhere. Many white lights... thousands of 'em. Farther off, red and green buoys and, far away along the horizon, the lights of a port: Maracaibo. We stopped, waiting to be piloted through the navigable channel. We seemed to wait for ages in that silence. Those who were tired went to sleep; I stayed just as I do now with you, and waited. That night it was a night of stars — different stars though from these. There we could see the Southern Cross — and all in that unimaginable silence. Suddenly we heard a howl, a howl from the forests, that froze our blood, a wild beast's howl. Then again there was silence and again we waited..."

He stopped speaking for a moment. From below, in the fishermen's boat, voices came up, then died down. The old man murmured:

"And fishermen came from the coast in boats made out of tree bark to sell us what they had: fish, eggs, fruit."

"At night?" Constantin asked.

The other laughed:

"Yes, at night... And if any of the boats capsized by the shore, the alligators were waiting... And when they went through the forest, those beasts with the fearful howl, jaguars or whatever their name is, attacked them... The derricks were surrounded with wire netting to protect the workers against the wild beasts. The workers were Americans. The Venezuelians were not taken on as workers. They had to abide by their bark boats and their fishing, and so, poor devils, they came... They came in the daytime, or at night, whenever they saw that a vessel had stopped and was waiting to enter port. They came... When poverty drives you... What do you think?..."

"Are they so poor, then?"

The old man nodded:

"Oh! the Socony fellows came from the bars at Maracaibo and Caracas in motor-cars eight yards long — something between a plane and a shop-window of surgical appliances... They danced and drank, and made love to beautiful women. And the others, the naked ones came in their boats through the flooded forests to the ship and shouted: *Señor, señor, unos huevos!* Come, buy eggs... eggs, fish, come, buy... So thin they were, poor devils, and covered with sores, desperate... A hell of a life... theirs..."

"And don't they do anything? Can't they do anything?" Constantin asked deeply moved. "They ought to do something! Have a revolution!"

The old man shrugged his shoulders:

"Out there it's Socony's who make the revolutions. They appointed a president, and then the Royal Dutch and the Shell companies made another revolution — shot the president and appointed another one. You saw only Venezuelians in all these affairs, some took bribes in sterling, others in dollars... And all these revolutionaries called themselves nationalists..."

"But weren't there any Communists? Isn't there a Communist Party there?"

The old man again shrugged his shoulders.

"I know there were some on board ship. On land I couldn't say. But what are you troubling about Venezuela for? To hell with it..." He drew a deep breath and shrugged his shoulders. In the light that came through the door of the signal room, his face seemed more wrinkled, more worn.

"That's how it is, my boy. When the company sent the *Arabella Robertson* to the Mediterranean, the captain who was a drunkard and a gambler managed the ship's money as he thought fit and a quarter of us fell ill with scurvy. You only know about that sort of thing from hearsay... But I can tell you that in the ports of the North-Atlantic I saw some seamen's unions which in 1934 made the shipowners shake in their shoes when their leaders thumped the table with their fists."

A star slid across the vault of heaven from north to south, like a long white streak of heavenly fire. Constantin said:

"Old Hell, won't you tell me some time how you sunk the *Arabella Robertson*?

"Why, of course, my lad, have I anything better to do?"

"Yes, you have ! See ! in a quarter of an hour we'll be starting..."

"How many hours' sail?" the old man asked with the almost complete unconcern of a man who has asked this question a great many times in his life.

"Two. As much as we were driven out of our course from noon till now."

The old man patted his cheek lightly, turned round and went heavily down the steps, disappearing in the darkness. His merry whistle could be heard again.

"Phew, phew, phew, phee !"

For some unknown reason, this chirping filled Constantin with a great sadness. Nor had his sadness dispersed when the throbbing engines sent a tremor through the ship to the very tip of her masts. And only when the ship was in motion did the wind that had risen cool his burning face. He looked furtively at Prodan, the helmsman, who stood impassive, his eyes staring fixedly at the dial of the compass, his hands ever active along the copper-encircled wheel.

The bell rang four times. Nicolau, his hair as rough as ever, came briskly up the steps.

"What did you say?" Nicolau asked.

"Nothing."

"I thought you spoke."

"No, I said nothing."

"Show me where we are..."

The two bent over the map with pencils and compasses in their hands.

"Look, we were here and have gone five miles to 45 degrees. The Danilofca brigades must be here... Comrade Prodan, the helm at zero !"

Prodan repeated:

"Helm at zero!"

The engines had stopped. The vessel glided by sheer inertia soon coming to rest; she did not even obey the helm — the helm was at zero.

✦

At that moment Preţiosu was picking his way carefully between the coils of cable on the quarter deck. Several of the girls employed at the factory had wrapped themselves in rugs and were sleeping here in the open air. The deep sea waves lightly swayed the ship's poop, raising it slowly for a long moment towards the stars, and letting it glide down gradually...

Preţiosu bent over the calm faces which looked pure and fresh in the faint star light. When he found the one he was seeking he sat down lightly by her. His knees cracked. Preţiosu took her by the shoulder and whispered:

"Margarita..."

The girl opened her eyes wide. They looked even bigger than usual now that they held a far-away look brought by sleep, by some dream — a beautiful wild look. The girl whispered:

"Who is it?"

"It's me... hush... not so loud!"

The girl started and raised herself on her elbow:

"Is it you, Uncle Sile?"

He drew so near to her, that the girl felt his breath upon her, smelling strongly of brandy:

"I say, lil' gal..."

She pushed him aside, drawing away from him:

"Go away, Uncle Sile! Go on, skip it! I'll tell..."

She stopped short. Who was she to tell these things to?

"I'll tell the Comrade Captain!"

Preţiosu chuckled amused, and made as if to take her in his arms. She drew away further from him, knocking into the girl who slept next to her, and who murmured in her sleep. A wide awake voice from the other side asked:

"What's the matter, who's that?"

Still edging away from him, the girl looked at him with those dark, savage eyes of hers. She had awakened the people about her to make a laughing-stock of him. Preţiosu rose and said under his breath:

"You'll remember this. I'll teach you!"

He picked himself up and left in a hurry. One of the girls had raised herself on her elbow and was looking after him. 'It's nothing, I'll say it wasn't me,' Preţiosu was thinking as he walked the deck in his bare feet, 'on such a moonless night nobody could be sure who it was.' But he was troubled. He went and knocked at Pricop's cabin:

"Pricop! Are you asleep? "

"What is it?" Pricop asked. "Oh, Preţiosu! Come in, the door's unlocked..."

Preţiosu went in. It was dark inside the cabin which was pervaded by a strong smell of tobacco smoke and sweat. He sat down on the side of the bunk and began telling Pricop his recent misadventure.

"I'm crazy about her," he whispered heatedly. "And I don't know how to get round her. Help me, Pricop; speak to her, promise her that..."

"Leave it to me, I know what to tell her," Pricop answered drowsily. "I understand you. I'll speak to her..."

"She threatened to tell the captain...!" Preţiosu burst out.

Pricop gave a quiet chuckle.

"I'll show that captain a thing or two!" Preţiosu went on threateningly. "I'll show all those aristocrats. Do they think that if they are officers and have learnt a bit they're above me?..."

"Yes, you must put them in their place!" Pricop murmured, "teach them to respect the Party, the devil take them! What do you care about the captain? You're a coming man, Sile, you'll get on and you'll surprise yourself by the position you'll hold. A year ago, for instance, you weren't secretary, were you?"

"I certainly wasn't," Preţiosu said having calmed down a little.

"Well... perhaps you'll be something much bigger next year... On the district committee, say. And why shouldn't you be?"

"That's a good one," Preţiosu remonstrated. "You're not serious, are you?"

"Oh, but I am! D'you think it's impossible?"

Preţiosu shrugged his shoulders in a dignified manner — a dignity which, in the darkness of the cabin, only he was aware of: "It's not impossible, but..."

"You see? As to that little tart, don't trouble about her. I understand you. I'll talk to her. In a way she's right: you rush her when she's with others... I understand her too. I understand you all."

XXII

The big idea had come to Mr. Zarifu like an explosion; he had been thinking of such things for long. Only half-heartedly, it is true, and without daring to confess it even to himself: the plans were too audacious, and when one looked around, what was there to justify them?

What entitled him to hope? A new, ugly, hostile world in which he occupied only the modest position of a clerk in a state institution, with a salary that was a hundred, nay a thousand times smaller than his former income. When he thought of Angelica's future, such as he had desired it, and, on the other hand, such as it shaped itself now, Mr. Zarifu felt the sweat trickling down his spine, in his anxious nights of insomnia.

And now, he had discovered Spiru Vasiliu. Spiru Vasiliu was a daring, courageous, confident young fellow, thought Mr. Zarifu who did not know that a tiny, secret voice kept sapping Spiru Vasiliu's confidence, telling him: 'You're intoxicated with mere words. You're old and without prospects. You will not succeed, you will not succeed, you will not.' When they talked things over till far into the night, and when Spiru Vasiliu said: 'Leave it to me, Uncle Tasuli, it will be done, we shall succeed !' Mr. Zarifu felt that the two of them would indeed do great things. For as far as youth went, Mr. Zarifu — who was 55, but had considered himself old at the age of forty, and in fact had actually been an old man at thirty, or maybe had always been old even in his adolescence, the adolescence of a serious, sedate, diligent boy who had paled and withered away between offices and safes — considered that Spiru Vasiliu – who was forty-five and boasted an early bald patch, but who laughed and spoke loudly, had been a lady-killer and had had any number of adventures — was still a young man. Mr. Zarifu no longer felt alone; there was a man by him from whom he could derive youth and daring, a man with whom he could work hand in hand and whom he could send to carry out the more difficult undertakings. An *alter ego*. More than a brother — a son. A man to whom he could entrust Angelica and Angelica's future. They

had spoken about her, too, and about her future. They had come to an understanding. Mr. Zarifu knew that there were stronger ties than those between businessmen linking him to Spiru: he was sure of Spiru. For long now he had felt the need of having such a man by him, though he had not been aware of it; he had been dying by slow degrees, dying of despondency and loneliness. And now, all of a sudden, he had found the right man, an idea and a plan. His life was not at an end. It was not a blind alley any longer. In a way it had only just begun; or rather a new life would begin, and quite soon. That had intoxicated Mr. Zarifu, had driven him almost crazy with delight. His fellow clerks had observed a change in him. They joked and mocked him: "What is it, Uncle Zarifu? Are you in love?" He was amused and laughed but did not answer, or if he did it was only by a joke — an unheard-of thing for this close, sad and weary man. His fellow clerks did not know that every day had a meaning for him at last, was a goal in itself; they did not know that he left the office in a hurry only to lock himself in his flat and go through the old commercial papers he had at home, in search of price lists and announcements from the stock exchanges abroad; and to cast up accounts endlessly as he waited for Spiru, who came every evening and with whom he calculated the expenses of their enterprise, their chances in imaginary operations, loans from banks which they were not sure still existed and big strokes of business in a totally unknown future.

However, Mr. Zarifu grew enthusiastic about it all. The little man with the big bald patch and big forehead over his wizened little face, with his little weak chin, was afire within. One day, late in the afternoon, he was walking in the streets around the port, calculating men-

tally the price of chartering merchant-ships, on the basis of 1938 prices, and of a broadcast from Zürich that he had heard a month before and in which two or three figures had been quoted. It needed a tremendous effort to build up a picture of the markets in London and Hamburg at that moment: it was a gigantic equation with an overwhelming number of unknown elements; but Zarifu relied principally on instinct, on the special feeling which had always enabled him to have a shrewd guess at everything that would happen, except the revolution which had made a weak, impoverished man of him. While his thin lips in his pinched, greyish face were moving with the calculations he was making, he stopped at a place overlooking the port. At his feet lay the valley thickly crowded with buildings, iron structures, trains, lorries, tractors in a continuous motion, the whole scene wrapped in the columns of smoke that rose from the funnels of the ships. The flags on the slender masts fluttered gently in the wind; heavy sheets of water struck against the breakwater and leapt up in columns of foam; beyond, the blue-grey tossing sea was assuming a darker hue. A tanker rode the waves ponderously, making for the north-east; a big cargo-boat was waiting for the pilot to take her into the port, rising and falling on the waves as if marking time. On the quay near the Maritime Station, a big, grey ship of Greek nationality, her upper deck and cabins black with age, was loading some cargo. It was an ancient vessel. In Mr. Zarifu's childhood the same *Efstathia* was already old, and, at that time, coasting in the Levant. Mr. Zarifu had known all the men who had captained the *Efstathia*. 'Who might it be now?' he asked himself mechanically. 'Dracopoleos? He was too old. He must have died. But back to more serious things... If in 1934 the freight for a ton of coal from Newcastle to London was eight shil-

lings, in 1954 a ton of timber from Constantza to Haifa would be...' He could not reckon it out, he became confused and his head swam. However, he was sure of one thing: of making piles of gold, whole mountains of it. And this made his head swim still more than his maddening calculations. He would talk things over with a captain or two returning from voyages. He had severed relations with all seamen, because he was too well known and had not been loved in his heyday — only envied and sometimes hated; but these connections had to be resumed and he would mix with these people again — even if there were risks involved; even if their welcome were poor, if they looked unfavourably on him, answered him coldly or not at all. He knew how to be pleasant and humble when he needed to be...

He drew his fluttering threadbare coat close — too big now for his small, dwindling body. A cold wind was blowing. Mr. Zarifu began to cough. A fellow who also stood contemplating the smoke-filled, noisy port lying at their feet in the rust-coloured light of the setting sun, turned and looked at him in surprise. He was trying to remember who he was. Mr. Zarifu, however, recognized him in the first instant and his heart beat fast as if someone had struck him right in the plexus. The man was Solomon Michels who had once had a bank, hotels and a shipping agency. He was grey-haired and had a discreet, nondescript appearance; he seemed to be saying: 'I'm a nobody, not worth looking at, someone who doesn't count.' But it was not so in former days, when he strutted about, his big paunch preceding him, looking around patronizingly, benevolently, and politely answering the numberless greetings that were directed towards him. 'Every two months I need a new hat, such crowds of unknown people greet me! And

it doesn't do, you know, not to answer greetings. Besides, one never knows what business one may do with these very people,' Mr. Michels would explain with the rich laugh of a man satisfied with himself and the whole world. It was not so now, though; he was indeed nondescript; a man like any other.

But the thing which no one observed even if one happened to give him some attention, did not escape Zarifu who, with shining eyes and a face still paler than its usual pallid colour, took him in at a glance from top to toe. A certain purple glow on his full cheeks, thin veins of blood in the smooth skin of his face — a certain secret assurance, gave Michels away.

"Good evening, Michels," Zarifu said. There was bitter reproach and hatred in his tone, as if he had said: 'You are fat and I am thin; no doubt you fare well. You've betrayed me; prospered at my expense; but my turn will come.'

"Good evening," Michels said in an embarrassed tone, "how are things?" He spoke with exaggerated friendliness. He saw Zarifu was shabby, very shabby, and he felt ashamed and fearful, knowing himself to be well fed and well dressed.

"Not so well as they are with you," Zarifu said with bitter irony. "But you always knew how to manage. My congratulations. You're clever. You've been wise; I am whole-heartedly glad of it," he added in disgust. He kept himself with difficulty from gnashing his teeth.

"You saved something, you've put something aside," Zarifu added, not asking, but merely stating a fact, like an accuser.

Michels parried the blow by a counter-blow:

"No, I did not, but I have a job — just like you, I heard..."

"Yes, yes," Zarifu stammered out in a hostile tone, with a contortion of his face which was anything but cheerful. He had tried to laugh but the result had been almost a grimace of suffering. A thought, an anxiety, an old apprehension had flashed through his mind more painfully than ever before the moment he had seen Michels by his side, looking at the vessels in the port. And Michels was not the only one... "And how are the boys?" Zarifu asked feigning indifference. He looked at the other man searchingly as if life and death depended on his answer. "The boys" were the shipping agents, the shipowners, the businessmen, some dozens of people who knew each other and called each other by their Christian names; they were all grey-haired men, some of them quite old.

"How can they be? Papadopol is in a co-operative in Bucharest... but he doesn't live on his salary... he sells things, thank God, he's still got something to sell... Roman's in prison — an affair with gold; he bought and sold gold coins," Michels said, glad that the conversation had diverted from himself. "What else do you want to know? Many of them are in Bucharest or elsewhere in the country."

"But you are here, so as to be near," Zarifu said with a crooked smile. "So as not to miss the train, is that it? To be on the spot!"

"I don't get you," the other said in embarrassment. "What do you mean, not to miss the train?"

"Come, come, don't pretend; I'm older than you, and have come up against more. Don't try to fool me, even though I've been fooled once and got worsted, not knowing how to put things away safely. However, that doesn't matter much, there's still something left here!" Zarifu said striking with his palm his wrinkled, yellow forehead which was unnaturally big on account

of the bald patch. "No, no, you can't fool me; you think I don't read your thoughts? That I don't know what goes on in your head? That I don't know you're lying in wait, you hyaenas!" And Zarifu gave a hollow laugh, making an effort to control the anger and passion which were gradually getting the better of him. I know what goes on in your head, my boy; I know everything! Absolutely everything! But we'll see what's to be seen! Before long, the race'll begin and we'll see who'll be first at the post! Old Zarifu's not yet done for. He's not dead. There's still fight left in him!" So spoke the former shipping-agent, striking himself on his thin narrow breast, that was more like a chicken's than a man's. Michels was upset but Zarifu would not let go of him: "If you count on doing things without me you'll be disappointed! No, my boy, you'll not be able to do that! You'll find the doors closed where you'd never expect them to be. In Alexandria, in the Piraeus, at Istambul and in Cyprus! You'll see! You get together and talk things over without me. You reach understandings and make arrangements without Zarifu. Zarifu is just carrion, he's finished. Well, you'll see whether it is as you think... Yes, yes, you'll see!" Zarifu said staring with a concentrated air and glowing eyes at Mr. Michels' rounded chin. The latter stepped back, but Zarifu took a step forward and got hold of the man's lapel. He leant towards him — he was shorter than Michels — and told him in a low voice, with a sly smile as he looked up at him at very close range: "If you were clever you'd include me in your combinations. We would associate. Well, what do you say to that? What? Tell me, eh?"

As he spoke, Michels became aware of a deadly smell emanating from him as from a decayed tooth.

However, it was not that, but actual fear that made him step back with such alacrity that he drew his coat out of Zarifu's claw.

"Another time," he stammered in fright. "We'll talk things over, another time; yes, yes, we'll talk things over," he said in a great hurry and left almost at a run.

Zarifu was left standing with his outstretched hand and an unpleasant grin on his face.

"You see that I know you; I sensed it all, at once." He spoke on although he no longer had an interlocutor. Then he became serious and concentrated again, resuming his calculations on the probable price of freight per ton in the Levant. But it no longer worked. He had been upset; and he was anxious and even downright afraid. He simply had to meet Spiru and discuss what was to be done, how to escape the threat of rivals. Spiru had gone with Angelica to the theatre; they were to come home together. Mr. Zarifu made for home at a quick pace, moving his puckered, sucked-in lips without cessation.

XXIII

That moment Angelica and Spiru Vasiliu were on their way home from the theatre. She looked straight before her, all her nerves frayed, unable to say a word. In his dark blue suit from which he had removed the stripes of his naval uniform, Spiru Vasiliu was also silent and nervous. He did not understand her. At the end of the first act, Angelica had got up and had said in a determined tone: "Let's go." He had followed her, surprised and puzzled. He realized that something had vexed her, but what was it?

"What has upset you, Angelica?"

"Nothing."

"Who's annoyed you?"

"Nobody."

"But what's happened, my love, why don't you laugh? Why don't you smile?"

"Oh, do leave me alone!" Angelica hissed. Her black eyes were aglow with fury; the delicate darker skin about her mouth and chin had paled, turning a greenish hue.

Spiru Vasiliu was just as desperate about this hardly perceptible unsightliness as about her bad humour. The fact that Angelica could change her expression and her disposition so easily both saddened him and made him anxious. And why should she snap at him with so much hostility?

"Have I vexed you, Angelica?"

"No, no, no, no! But leave me alone, I tell you! Just leave me alone!"

They were both silent. Now and again Spiru Vasiliu cast a sidelong glance at the fresh, velvety sombre face of the girl. But he did not realize that her splendid black eyes examined him with a cold and critical look. Later, when they passed into a dark little street, Spiru Vasiliu, who lay awake whole nights thinking of Angelica and picturing the moment when she would be his, tried to take her in his arms and kiss her. He had been waiting for that moment for several days and was paralysed with happiness when he felt the moment near. But Angelica shied and resisted savagely; she bent her head low, resting her chin on her breast and sticking her fists in Spiru's stomach, so that he only succeeded in kissing the top of her head, hurting his teeth in the process. Spiru set his jaws, all pale with vexation, and

walked on beside Angelica without a word; the girl on the other hand suddenly became calmer, more serene.

Finally they went down a little street from the end of which the sea could be seen — a little street always swept by the sea wind — and stopped for a moment in front of the house, which for many, so many years, had threatened to collapse together with the edge of the cliff on which it was perched. Spiru Vasiliu pressed her hand, but without response. Angelica entered the house and Spiru Vasiliu followed her, his head low.

Zarifu was waiting for them. Spiru Vasiliu pulled himself together. In this house he was — had to be — a confident, daring, cheerful, all-conquering fellow. He began to speak loudly.

"Well, Uncle Tasuli, and how are you? And how's the reckoning going? Have you found out what the freight for our goods might be?"

The three of them stood in the narrow room with its sombre, heterogeneous furniture, Dobrujan carpets hanging on the walls and useless little things scattered everywhere: that shoehorn, for instance, on which was written *W. Hansen, Zapatero, Arenal 2411, Buenos Aires*, which nobody used but which always lay there on the table; and that soiled and crumpled issue of a picture magazine of ten years ago. Old Zarifu sat resting his elbows on the table and did not speak. The light shone upon his bald patch, but his face was shaded. Angelica had gone over to the cold stove and was leaning against it — a movement which had become natural with her during the last winters, when it had been unusually cold — looking critically at Spiru Vasiliu. She realized the sudden change in him from the front-door to the room where they were now and felt that something was wrong somewhere.

"I've been thinking, Uncle Tasuli," Spiru was saying; "I've been doing some thinking; the moment we can get a passport, we'll quit here, or, if you prefer, I'll go alone as best I can, by goods or passenger train or even by lorry, anyhow, and never stop before reaching Genoa or Le Havre; in the meantime you'll have cabled a bank there to open a credit for me of 100,000 dollars and I'll buy a ship at once. And we'll load her there, on credit, with a mortgage on the vessel; load her with anything: needles, farming machinery, lipstick. Eh, what do you say to that? And then off we'll go! *Vira ancora!* Full steam ahead!"

He gave a nervous, excited laugh, behind which there was secret diffidence. Mr. Zarifu cast him a searching look in which there was reproach and anxiety. He leaned over to him and said:

"And if I have no credit in the market?"

There was a moment's silence. Spiru Vasiliu hesitated. He looked at Angelica for a moment but found no encouragement in her cold and critical air of observation. He had not yet stammered out an answer, when Mr. Zarifu took him by the hand and drew him towards him.

"What will you do about me then? About us, I should say," he added in a nervous pleading tone. "I'm not asking for my own sake," he continued, "I'm not asking for my own sake but for this child's... for my child's sake..."

He was choking; he spoke to Angelica over his shoulder:

"You go to bed; it is late... Go, father's pet, go and have your sleep..."

Angelica went out noiselessly. Spiru turned round looking for a glance from her — a smile. In vain, Angelica did not even glance at him.

"What are you going to do about us?" Mr. Zarifu asked with much pity for himself and his daughter in his tremulous voice and swimming eyes. "Where will you take us?"

"I?" Spiru Vasiliu asked in bewilderment. "Tell me what to do and I'll do it."

"You're young, and you'll be the head of the family," Zarifu flattered him in the same whining tone. "You must think for me, too, because, you must know," he said, both his hands clinging to Spiru and whispering to him the awful secret, "you must know that in the early days there'll be no credit open to me; perhaps later, but it's the first days that will count, Spiru! You must be sharp then! Otherwise you'll find all the places taken, all the agencies grabbed, contracts with the companies concluded! There'll be nothing left but transactions with small firms, coasting trade with a cargo of oranges or raisins! You must think things out, Spiru, Angelica's future is at stake!"

Vexed and tortured by the fear of having displeased Angelica, thinking: 'of course, I'm very nearly fifty and she's only twenty, a mere child; what is there about me to attract her?' — all atremble with passion at the idea that she might yet love him, distracted by Zarifu's sudden doubts and distrust, Spiru Vasiliu began the task of convincing him that there was no reason for anxiety, that everything would turn out well...

"But that's not all! There's something I haven't told you," Zarifu whispered staring at him. "There's something you don't know! All those people! Those hyaenas! I met Michels; he was looking over the port. Couldn't even conceal his thoughts! I read him as if he'd been an open book. They're waiting for the same opportunity. They've made the same plans."

"Don't worry, Uncle Tasuli," Spiru said with a laugh, "don't worry; there's room for all of us. The sea's wide and the ports are many."

"Well, I don't like it! I don't like it! And don't tell me that, even as a joke," came Zarifu's hurried answer. "No, no, no," he said in the hesitating voice of a man older than he actually was. "You must be ambitious; if you let the others live, they'll soon agree to stifle you, finish you off! I don't know what there is about you tonight, Spiru; you don't seem to be the same man. You'd better think how to get some credit, how to raise money for a ship. You must find some; I trust you. Think things over, and you'll surely see your way. Not for my sake," he said suddenly in a different tone of great secrecy. "You know that I have done with life; but there's Angelica."

Angelica! How was he to win Angelica? That night Spiru Vasiliu left Zarifu's house in despair — that he, the lady-killer, who after a long interval of sullen loneliness, had preserved all his mannerisms of a conqueror should now have turned, in the few weeks he had known Angelica, into a clumsy, timid man, paralysed by his own love. There was nothing of the old Spiru Vasiliu left in him; in her hands he was a puppet; she could do what she liked with him, make him merry or sad in a few moments.

And now that ship! Where was he to find one? How was he to raise credit? Often now he sat on a bench facing the sea, in the wind that shook the pine trees, and thought about these things. At the office he was inattentive, troubled and tired; he was criticized and reproved; he had even made big mistakes for which part of his salary was kept back.

And in Zarifu's house, as he drank coffee substitute with the former shipping-agent, he would say:

"Don't worry, Uncle Tasuli; we'll get credit on my captain's commission for long distance sailing. And for the rest we'll borrow on the credit we already have! Credit on credit!"

When he was left alone with Angelica, he took her hands into his, drew her towards him, kissed her — when, although disgusted, she condescended to let him — and whispered to her:

"I'll take you to Paris, in a long motor-car, a limousine, a Cadillac. We'll go to the Opera — descend the big stairs, I in full evening dress with my decorations and you in a white dress sweeping the floor with a train; and diamonds in your ears, round your neck and in your hair."

And while Angelica consented dreamily, he kissed her hair scented with cheap eau de Cologne.

"... and the fellows'll ask: 'Who are they?' 'Oh, a shipowner from Alexandria with his wife, a celebrated beauty...' For we'll live in Alexandria, Angelica, in luxury and wealth..."

Angelica sighed:

"You're fooling me... Who are the shipowners you're talking about? And Paris? All rot! Where's the money? Where are the ships?"

And after such an evening Spiru Vasiliu would leave exhausted, fagged out like a man who had worked a whole summer's day without a drop of water. He felt like tearing out even the little hair he still had. How was he to persuade her? How to seduce her?

And old Zarifu kept repeating as if haunted:

"We must get in first! Ahead of them all! Think it over, Spiru! Raise the cash without fail. Money! A ship!"

XXIV

The boat smelt of pitch and fish. They were thirsty and tired. Cosma rowed slowly with wide movements. In the stern, Emelian drew out hook after hook. They had been working for many hours, since sunset. It was night now. The waves were big and gentle; the water running from the oars was green like wormwood, with thousands of air bubbles. It reminded Cosma of a bottle of mineral water he had drunk at Constantza. That's how this water was; only he was far thirstier now, and it was salty and bitter and deep, so deep... The sea was a greenish black, and the sky was green, and the moon as if made of greenish silver; and the stars, too, had a greenish glint in them. There was no light along the black horizon. They were alone in the middle of the world, and the whole world was a desolate sea in the moonlight.

Suddenly, Emelian roared:

"Stop, there he is!"

A big prickly and knotty ray struggled on the hook; a gaff had stuck into it and held it fast. Turning round, Emelian spoke sharply:

"Cosma, take care, man, you'll get that gaff into me some day. Slow down a bit."

Cosma answered with sombre pride:

"I can hit what I want... even the head of a pin if necessary!"

Emelian took the fish by its mouth, drew out the hook and threw it into the boat. The fish fell over the rest of the catch with a plash and Emelian Romanov again turned towards the sea murmuring:

"To the right..."

Suddenly he became particularly attentive; his movements were slow, though just as sure and efficient. A shadow had flashed through the water followed by a silvery glint and by a long shadow. He spoke in a strange, unnaturally quiet voice:

"Cosma..."

Cosma let go of the oars and got hold of the gaff. He waited for a moment. Emelian was drawing up more and more lengths of line at a time, with swifter and swifter movements. The long body of a fish could be seen, like a purple spindle swaying and struggling somewhere deep down in the water. Emelian drew the line inboard, length after length; the fish was coming to the surface. Another length of the line and the head of the fish appeared, a head as big as a bushel, of a grey-green colour, with a gaping mouth and a pointed, triangular nose, and small eyes. The cod struggled wildly beating the water with its tail. It tugged at the line and struck against the side of the boat, every blow giving a deep-toned ring as if an empty cask were being struck with a paving-beetle... It curled up, and thrust its head back into the water, but Emelian, groaning under the strain, for the line cut into his palms, had it out. The whole scene took no longer than a moment: the boat rocked, spurting water into the air, while the tail of the fish, nearly as long as the boat, repeatedly struck the water and the boat's side. His knees slightly bent, Cosma stabbed the cod with his gaff. It was a mighty effort. But the fellow was big, with broad shoulders and arms that were thicker and brawnier than those of the common run of men.

A black streak of blood trickled down the white belly of the cod. Cosma stabbed the fish again and again. Then, without another look at it, he laid the blood-

stained tool on the seat and started to give a hand to Emelian:

"Come on, Uncle Emelian... get the head into the boat first — the heaviest part of it..."

"Are you teaching me?" Emelian groaned, his forehead covered with beads of sweat. "Don't I know it? But the head alone must weigh two hundred pounds..."

He brought his fist crashing down on the cod's head, while Cosma followed this up with a blow from a wooden club, putting out the fish's eye.

Sticking short gaffs into the cod, they drew the forepart of the fish over the gunwale. The cod rolled into the boat, its tail alone hanging out of it. Emelian took hold of the gaff formerly used by Cosma, stuck it into a thinner part of the fish, and dragged it into the boat. They sat down and wiped the sweat from their faces with their arms and shirt sleeves, looking at the fish and at each other. Emelian said: "Four hundred, yes..."

"Maybe a little more," Cosma murmured.

For the first time since his fit of sadness and moroseness had come upon him, he had spoken without being spoken to. He smiled contentedly, as he directed his clear, childlike eyes on the fish which very nearly filled the boat. Emelian patted him on the shoulder:

"Christ, Cosma! I wouldn't like to rub you up the wrong way. Look: you stabbed it right in the heart!"

A troubled look came into Cosma's childlike eyes and there was a slight, almost imperceptible contortion of his face. He seemed to have become darker and more mature. He muttered as he gave a mirthless laugh:

"Bah! Where was I to aim? The heart's the only place. I told you I always hit the place I want..."

He again lapsed into silence. Astonished by his behaviour, Emelian looked searchingly at him, then took hold of the line again.

"More to the right... Push now. And you'll have to wash all that blood in the boat..."

✦

The shining blue expanse of sea lost itself quietly in the horizon, so that it was hard to tell where the sky began. Fleecy white clouds gathered, grew into a fluffy white mass and disintegrated without any reason: in a few seconds the cloud which had been pink-tinged became so many globes of vapour, and then, the next time you looked, it had disappeared altogether, absorbed in the blazing air. A slight, cool breeze sometimes chased over the waters, but soon died down again and the atmosphere was once more only a motionless and burning force.

A cutter with two boats — three black dots — could be seen to the south-east. To the west, another black dot on the blue mirror of the sea was Emelian Romanov's boat. It was the nearest to the mother-ship. In that direction a thin column of smoke rose over the water from behind the rounded curve of the globe. The *October Star* was signalling: 'Here I am. In case of need, this is where you find me.'

Iermolai did not consider it necessary to start for the mother-ship yet. Bare to the waist, as hefty as a weight-lifter, with his red snub nose and cheek-bones and small blue eyes, he sat in his boat and drew in the line. He was in a good humour caused by the speech of a lad of some eighteen years, who pushed at the oars. Behind the lad sat a young man with a rough-hewn face and an old army cap shoved to the back of his head. There was

an amused grin on his face, too, as he listened to the speaker.

The slender youngster with his handsome face, green eyes and curly fair hair, was particularly annoyed by Iermolai's laughter and the fact that his words did not seem to affect him. Even now Iermolai was teasing him:

"Why, Andrei man, aren't you ever going to shave? Your beard's an ell long already!"

The youngster, who had not a single hair on his chin, spoke angrily:

"Why can't you be serious, Uncle Iermolai, and do as I say, instead of making fun of my beard? Blast my beard, Uncle Iermolai, leave it alone and look after yourself. Isn't it only today at noon that you began to fish, not being sober enough last night, you blasted son of a gun of an Uncle Iermolai! To hell with your damned drunkenness! Leave the cursed drink alone, Uncle Iermolai! I'm at sea to fish, blast you, for my parents are old and I must feed them, Uncle Iermolai, and you do nothing but drink, you bloody son of a bitch! If you've come as far as here, get your hand in, and give over drinking, blast your mother! Know that I'll never come to sea with you again. I'll go with another brigade but never with you any more, you damned son of a bitch — and may God forgive me!"

He was swearing angrily though in a melancholy, grieved tone, which made the other oarsman go into fits of uproarious mirth. But Iermolai had become tired of it. He grew annoyed and irritable. Finally he mumbled:

"Hm! you speak so fine — one of those sects ought to make you their preacher... moving people to good deeds in such lovely language..."

The other oarsman was bent double, holding his sides with laughter. Andrei, however, answered quietly:

"Damn and blast your lovely language! Am I right or not?"

Iermolai looked away, avoiding the youngster's green eyes which sparkled like the sea in the midday sun and muttered:

"Hold your trap, you make me sick... I've never heard a young man use such filthy language before..."

"It's your drunkenness of the day before yesterday that makes you sick — four men had to hold you and pour gallons of water over you to make you fit to attend the meeting!" the youngster answered undaunted.

"That's not true about the gallons of water!" Iermolai retorted hurt. "They put me under the pump."

"And it's the brandy you pour into yourself without a stop that's filthy and not my swearing — that hasn't harmed anyone yet while the brandy'll finish you, damn and blast you, Uncle Iermolai!"

Iermolai sighed and answered nothing. It depressed him to be talked to like that. He drew out a length or two of line, looking dismally into the water. Suddenly the expression of his face changed and he began to pull at the line quickly, and when he spoke it was in a sharp and clear voice: "The gaff!"

Andrei got hold of the gaff. With great difficulty, Iermolai drew the head of a sturgeon out of the water and Andrei thrust his steel gaff into it with a movement as swift as lightning. After much struggling the three of them pulled the sturgeon out of the water. Then, with its belly upwards and all bleeding they finally stretched it out on the bottom of the boat, after which they sought to recover their breath. Iermolai muttered pleased with himself:

"Now that we have this three-hundred pounder we might as well go over to *Mother*..."

Andrei did not speak. He merely cast one look at Iermolai who blinked quickly, and continued:

"... but we'll stay until night and... if there be fish we'll stay tomorrow too."

And suddenly he roared at the second oarsman:

"Now, Pavel, yer fool, what'yer laughing at? Asking for something you won't rub off so easy, eh?"

Penitently, the fisherman murmured in a choked voice:

"I'm not laughing..."

But crouching behind Andrei's back he shook mysteriously. Iermolai continued to draw length after length of brown line dripping with salt water out of the sea and spoke to himself philosophically:

"Moreover, it burns your throat that brandy... It's not good stuff... Shut up! shut up, ye pagan, and give over yer swearing! What a foul mouth the youngster has to be sure..." And he continued to draw out the fishing-line. He was still heavy with drink, felt mighty sick and would have preferred sleep to work, and he was angry too — that is as far as he could be angry. That's how it was with him. Very angry he could not be, nor angry for long, and especially with the men of his boat. So now, kneeling in the boat, he turned towards them, and holding the line in one hand, he struck his breast with the other and the sound it gave off rang like a wall:

"The devil take ye! I'm still fond of ye. It's here I hold ye, in my heart, the devil take ye!"

After which he turned his broad back upon them and continued drawing out the fishing-line with patient movements of his thick, veiny arms — the arms which,

with the same movement, drew out the line hundreds of times a day.

XXV

A cutter with two boats in tow was sailing away, whipping up the foam as her bows struck the wind-rippled waves. A second cutter was hailing from the north-east. About two hundred yards from the *October Star* another two cutters waited their turn at unloading. They slid now to one side, now to the other, their short masts oscillating like the pendulums of a metronome.

And under the tall iron sides of the *October Star*, boats which had rowed over to the ship, waited their turn to unload.

From the derrick boom of the foremast an immense net descended along pulleys and cables, and into this Emelian and Cosma threw their catch of ray, shark and sea monsters. The ray they took by the mouth so as not to be pricked by their spiky, knotty skin, and threw them into the net over the other fish. Two cod of four hundred pounds each, they hung on the cable's hook: the net would not have held them. A number of heads looked on from the upper decks: the captain, Nicolau, Old Hell; and over the rail of the forecastle deck Margarita and a grey-haired sailor watched Cosma as he finished loading the net. At last their boat was empty, though bespattered with blood and fish scale, and Cosma using a deck brush and baler began to clean it. Then, while Emelian climbed the rope-ladder which had been thrown over the rails, Cosma took hold of the steel cable with one hand and rested his feet on the iron ring of the net. He did it with the natural, lithe grace that every one of

his movements had; and hanging thus over the net into which a ton of fish had been loaded, he shouted:

"Heave ahoy!"

"Whatch'ye doing, man? Come down," the men who looked on shouted, not knowing whether to be amused or scared.

With the order "*vira!*" the steam winch on deck gave a rumble, the cables became taut and Cosma rose in the air. If the girl in overalls with her trousers rolled up to the knees showing white, strong legs, and who laughed as she watched him, had been moved to pity for him, she would have observed something that the others hadn't noticed, namely, that there was something forced about Cosma's mirth: a kind of wretched reckless indifference in the ease and power of his movements. But she was not moved to pity. On the contrary, she turned towards the winch-operator and shouted with a laugh:

"Go it, Lae, go it! give him a bathe and wash the fish as well!"

Brave in his huge head-dress, Lae prepared to obey and let down the net, or maybe he had no real intention of letting it drop but was only pretending.

However, Nicolau roared out from above:

"What's that? Who orders the manoeuvring of the winch here? Back to the factory, Comrade! And you, Lae, where's your head?" After which short outburst, he stopped suddenly, and entered his cabin in silence. He had remembered the criticism passed on him by Preţiosu. 'Shouting at them again,' he thought miserably.

"A devil of a mouth, mine..." He was upset. "Though I don't regret it; they would have caused more trouble — the fools."

When the question of dipping him had arisen, Cosma had not moved. Now he quietly waited till the net was hauled on deck, jumped off, and, without seeming to take notice of anyone, untied the knot at the bottom of the net, jumping aside as a ton of fish poured out on the deck. The men of the fishery began loading the ray into baskets and weighing them, while Emelian, his arms akimbo, shouted:

"Cosma, give us a knife !"

Cosma drew two knives out of his boots, handing one to Emelian without a word. The two bent over one of the big cod, ripped it open and began dressing it down. In the meantime, Lae had come over from his winch and turned towards them a water hose to wash the deck of blood and the black remains of the fish. Margarita whispered something into Lae's ear as she looked at Cosma, and laughed. Lae did not seem to have heard anything; but Cosma watched them furtively, then bent still lower over the cod and proceeded with the dressing down. As he stood with bent head he kept looking at Lae from under his arm, whilst the latter did not suspect he was being observed. And, wielding the shining knife that was as sharp as a razor, it seemed to him, as he threw his furtive glances, that he was looking upon Lae for the first time.

✦

Cosma wandered aimlessly about the boat; and those who saw him could not but think: there goes a big, hulking fellow with hands like shovels, walking about doing nothing. That's how Cosma seemed indeed: calmly looking around him with childlike eyes, and wandering from place to place without talking to anyone.

Once he went to the pump in the stern and drank from the cup hanging there on a chain. And while he drank he looked over the top of the cup at two young people who sat on a wooden seat upon the quarter deck. Two young people — a man and a girl.

The girl was Margarita; she sat with her hands in her lap, her bare feet crossed under the bench and looked at Lae with adoring eyes; while Lae, with his head of permanently waved hair, his lady-killer's whiskers on his cheeks and dressed in a striped sweater which made visible an anchor and a mermaid tattooed on his arms, spoke to her in a low voice, lapsing into silence now and again, and looking at her with eyes similar to her own. They were entirely taken up with each other and unaware of anyone around them. There was a blue sky, a sea with sea-gulls floating upon it like domestic fowls, and clouds as white as the sea-gulls; but there was also Uncle Marinică, the boatswain; and Prodan, the helmsman, both naked to the waist, with a handkerchief tied around their necks, mending a torn cable. Uncle Marinică and Prodan did not look at the two lovers, and the two young people had eyes only for each other. Sometimes a smile played about their lips, then looking into one another's eyes they would suddenly become serious as if searching for something, and astonished at the result of their search.

Cosma put back the cup carefully in its place wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. The chief-engineer who stood close by whistled low between his teeth:

"Tch, tch, tch!" Then mumbled: "Ugh! just look at them: they've gone quite dotty!"

The fisherman to whom the old man had spoken looked at him with serene blue eyes that reflected no

thought; he gave no sign that he had heard or understood. He had looked at him like a deaf man or a man of another people from far away. Then he turned about and went away slowly, swinging his broad shoulders as he went, and with the same quiet manner, continued walking aimlessly about the deck. The old man was astonished:

"Another one now! A hell of a floating bedlam!"

And taking a drink of water, he, too, went away. As he passed under the radio-telegraphist's cabin he stopped and whistled like a bird. The radio-telegraphist popped out his head. The old man asked: "How's the weather? Any change?"

"Fresh breeze, rough sea," the other answered drawing back his head and disappearing immediately.

The old man noted philosophically for his own benefit:

"Then we're in for it!" he said, but looking around at the blue sky and calm sea, corrected himself:

"That is we'll be in for it, tomorrow..."

He went up to the bridge. The second officer, a silent and retired young man, had come out with the sextant. He raised it to his eyes, turning the screws. After which he entered the signal-room and began his calculations of latitude and longitude. The old man remained without. The captain came from the other watch deck and stood by him. Neither spoke for the moment. Then the old man mumbled:

"The weather's changing."

The captain gave no answer.

"Many boats out?"

The captain shrugged his shoulders and murmured something curtly and irritably, which meant: "Can't you see them around the store-room? Most of them are there. What boats can there be at sea?" The old man

understood the meaning of his mumbled words and the shrug, and acquiesced benevolently:

"You're right... to hell with this floating bedlam!"

At that moment Cosma stood leaning against the metal wall of a cabin, his eyes closed. He could no longer stifle the feeling in his heart; no longer endure that terrible torment; he could not. He felt he was going mad, was developing some illness and dying of it; that he was carrying a millstone on his back, and it was too heavy for him; that some venomous thing was gnawing at his heart and he could no longer suffer the pain of it. Nor could he unburden his heart to Emelian. Something stopped him, kept his mouth padlocked. He could not come out of himself, out of the poisonous loneliness of his soul, except by a single means. And when he thought of Margarita and Lae he felt his flesh creep and a savage, terrible, uncontrollable power surge up in his body. He had them always before his eyes, especially Lae with his whiskers down his cheeks. Together they made fun of him and maybe were laughing at him even now. He had taken her from him; he had changed her into something different from what she had been and had, indeed, taken her from him. So Cosma thought, picturing to himself the two of them sitting together and fondling each other, at which waves of pain and loathing swept over him. There was no way out of this torment except... No! words wouldn't do. The knife! There was no other way out... but the knife!

✦

High up on the forecastle deck, flashes of lightning lit up the mast, the derrick-boom, the rows of wire, the iron machinery on deck and the inky sea. They were nearer now and more blinding. At one moment the whole

ship suddenly leapt out of darkness and was made entirely visible, even to a piece of rope on board, a lump of coal on the iron steps leading up to the forecastle and the wires of the radio aerial. Then, at the same moment, everything was dark again, and you found it difficult to know where to place your foot, so as to keep from falling down the hatchway leading to the factory below. From the other side of the deck the wash of the sea was heard. Now the lightning had ceased to flash and your heart contracted as you waited for the fearful rumble of the thunder. A minute... two... three... and no noise was heard. Merely the thud of the waves as they struck against the iron sides of the ship. There was to be no thunder. The darkness was warm, stifling, and you waited for the next flash of lightning.

In a secluded corner Cosma sat on a cast-iron belt by the rails... A fishing-boat, for which no crew had been found on this outgoing, was fastened on deck, and there, between it and the rails, his elbows resting on his knees, Cosma sat holding his breath, unseen, unsuspected.

He had decided what he must do and yet he could not get up to do it. He had only a few steps to take: for whenever the lightning flashed, it showed up quite clearly the white painted iron wall with its round portholes and two black doors — the sleeping quarters of most of the crew. That was where he had to go. It was dark in that place, but Cosma had been there in the daytime and knew where to find his man. And now he had decided to look for him... and, when he had found him...

Of course, he might be seen when it lightened. What of it? Did it matter if anyone saw him — if he was discovered? He'd be careful, of course, and keep under cover. But a strange numbness had seized him and he

didn't care for anything; he might try to avoid being seen or he might not; but seen or not, it didn't matter. He didn't care. The only thing was to make up his mind, to get up from the bitt and go there, to that white wall that showed its black openings in the lightning flashes.

But had he made up his mind? Was he certain he would do it? He didn't know. He had no power to think; that question had come to him as a kind of numbness, of weariness; though it was no weariness either, rather a kind of sickly heaviness. All his big and powerful body was paralysed, gone stiff there with his elbows resting on his knees.

'I have rubber boots on, so nobody'll hear me,' Cosma thought suddenly; and this thought was so unexpected that he was astonished that such a detail had occurred to him so suddenly. As if he cared if anyone heard him or not!

There was an unimaginable peace over the sea. Hot, motionless air; lightning flashes, suspense and silence...

Cosma breathed with difficulty. His heart beat fast. Why this weakness in him? Had he still not made up his mind?

A dazzling flash of lightning lit up the vessel as if it had been daylight — a strange day in which everything was lilac blue. Then darkness fell and Cosma felt as if blinded. It was then that the sheets of air in the atmosphere were torn apart with a deafening noise like the salvo of an unseen artillery — the first claps of thunder. Then silence and darkness again — and suspense.

With an effort Cosma rose and groped his way in the dark towards the prow. He trod on something soft and gave a start. It seemed to have been something living. He pulled himself together. It might have been a

canvas hose. Then he stumbled upon some chains which returned the noise of iron. Cosma felt himself sweating all over. Another flash of lightning, fork lightning — a vein of flame — tore the night sky across from end to end and struck the black water. Cosma was blinded by the whiteness of the wall in front of him — the wall with the open door, a step ahead — and felt as if he stood alone and naked on the upper deck. Anyone might have seen him but he didn't care. He had to do what he had come to do. What followed after was all the same to him. In the pitch darkness which had again fallen, the fearful rumble of the thunder pierced his ears but Cosma was hardly aware of it. He stooped, took the knife with which he ripped open the big sturgeon from his boot and went inside.

There was no movement. The men there seemed hardly to breathe. Were they asleep? Awake? The air was heavy with the smell of sweating human bodies, and the heat was stifling. Cosma groped with his hands; the fourth bunk to the left, the lower one. He advanced, feeling his way cautiously.

Another flash of lightning showed up everything: the bed curtains, the wooden slippers and the boots on the floor, the unpainted table with a bottle on it, two looking-glasses for shaving, a few plates and tin cutlery, and a folded newspaper that had slipped to the ground. Then the light went out and Cosma was bending over a body.

Yes! he was here. Here was Lae with his long, curly hair, the whiskers on his cheeks and the tattooes on his arms. The knife would easily go into him. Surely he had no more life in him than the big cod. And then there would be an end to suffering, hatred, jealousy and Margarita's vile love for Lae; there would be an

end to everything; what would follow was of no importance. He had to make an end of things now. He raised the hand that held the knife, waiting for a flash of lightning to show him where to strike; he would make one quick thrust with the knife — thrust deep down with all his might. Dazzling flashes of lightning lit up the whole scene. And somewhere, nearby, the thunder crashed with a noise more shattering than the report of a cannon. Again the lightning struck the sea. Another flash, another and yet another ! Now there were nothing but violet lights, and crashes of thunder which shook your brains. Cosma stood there with the raised knife. In the lower bunk Lae slept on his side, in his shirt, without pants, his head on his arm, face downwards under Cosma's knife. His high head-dress all tousled stood up like a club, like a crest, like a curly tuft.

He slept with his mouth open and a thin streak of saliva trickled from the corner of his mouth. His shirt was rolled up and showed his hairy legs and his white behind sticking up in the air.

Cosma felt something rise within him he had never known or heard of till then. Another flash of lightning again showed up Lae's indecent, hairy, twisted body. This then was what Margarita loved ! This ! And this he had wanted to kill. For this he had intended to kill, to burden his heart with the crime of murder. This it was he had hated like a madman and for which he had been ready to become a murderer.

His arm fell, slowly, and turning he went out of the room walking with determination, yet as if in his sleep... Lightning struck the water a few yards from the ship's side. Cosma went up to the upper deck, and there hesitated, the knife in his hand. He looked at the knife, shivered, and threw it over the rail a long way

off. The knife fell into the water without a sound amidst the low rumble of thunder.

Suddenly Cosma remembered how Lae had lain in bed, the sight he had offered, and how Margarita loved him, and himself who had wanted to kill him, and he began to laugh. He laughed louder and louder, holding his sides. He laughed, with tears trickling down his cheeks, and went on laughing so that he was afraid something would break within him. It was only much later that he became quiet, sighed and wiped away his tears. Then he took a deep breath and felt relieved. He had not realized that nobody could have heard him laugh... he had laughed in the midst of the thunder — nor that nobody could have seen him for the blinding flashes of lightning never ceased — the flashes were one dazzling glare of bluish flame. Veins of fire weaving a network between the clouds and the sea ran everywhere through the atmosphere.

That night Luca Gheorghe sat in his fishing-boat with the rain pouring down on him and swore loudly and volubly. Nobody heard him, however, for the thunder rolled and the hail, accompanying the big heavy drops of rain fell with a rattle; and while the men strove their utmost to bale out the water, Luca Gheorghe went on swearing as he strained his eyes to pierce the darkness around him — though he could see nothing but the glimmer of the watery spears that fell from on high.

"They give us lamps without chimneys! Without chimneys!" he spluttered. "If only I had some of you here in the fishing-boat with me, you who... you... sending us hurricane lamps without chimneys; you,

Preţiosu, you, who don't want to consider the fishermen's work and the work of the men on the ship a common problem... Oh! Oh! if only I had you here!"

He swore his best in such a fearful voice that the men were finally made aware of it and looked up to see what had happened. And then, chilled to the bone, they again fell listless, until a huge monster of darkness emerged from the rampart of the rain and was seen to be coming upon them, its outline expanding with every passing second. High up were the position lights — the white light at the mast, the red and green lights on either side — and they could see them all which meant that the ship was making straight for them.

Luca Gheorghe had jumped to the oars and was pulling with all his might, his head thrown back. With lightning speed the other two had jumped to their seats and were doing the same. The fishing-boat might have been said to skim over the water. In a few seconds, the high prow with a thick foam rising all around it had passed them within a few yards and was now being followed by an iron wall out of which at short intervals a thin stream of water flowed. From a certain height up the iron wall shone a few round patches of light, then came the bridge powerfully lighted, and immediately after the poop with its churning screws; then the boat drew away amidst a great roar of engines. The men ceased rowing, hot and sweating under the icy rain.

"Heavens above!" one of the young men whispered.

Luca Gheorghe heaved a deep sigh and wiped his forehead.

"And that's that..." he said hoarsely. "They know that we fish along the line Istambul, Constantza,

Odessa, and they give us hurricane lamps without chimneys !"

"If only the others have kept clear of her tonight..." the second oarsman said to Luca Gheorghe in a murmur. The latter scanned the darkness into which the unknown ship — on board of which nobody suspected or could suspect anything — was disappearing. But the rain now hid the ship from sight.

"Come on, get the balers, and bale out," Luca Gheorghe ordered.

"Did you think that somebody would hear us?" one of the young men asked as he bent to take up the baler.

"Well, supposing she'd run us down, I wanted to be sure we'd done everything we could," Luca Gheorghe mumbled in disgust. "Come on, get a move on and give me a baler, Mihei, the water's a hand high !"

In half an hour the ship which had passed Luca Gheorghe — an empty Italian tanker quite lately launched — was nearing the fishing grounds of Matei Gheorghe's brigade at twenty odd knots per hour. The three fishing-boats were tossing at anchor — three black curved shapes, each covered with its wet sail under which the fishermen were dozing, fatigued by the day's work. Matvei Chirsanov slept, his hand under his cheek, dreaming that a cat had bitten that very hand. In actual fact it was becoming numb from being pressed against the side of the boat. But the sensation of numbness was not enough to wake Matvei. He dreamt too that his wife had given him a baby to take to Constantza. Was the child their own? He couldn't have said. But Matvei was very much in love with his wife, and she had asked him to take the baby, so he had to do so. He held the baby, which was wrapped in some

red clothing, in his arms. It was cold on the way — nasty winter weather — so Matvei went into a pub to get a drink to warm himself. After a little glass of brandy, he was ready to continue his way. But he suddenly realized that he no longer had the baby, that it had slipped from his arms, or maybe from his shoulder, and that he had lost it. He turned back; he knew where he had had it last. He must have lost it immediately after that. Yes — that was the place, where there were thorns and stone slabs and a light which was neither sunlight nor moonlight, a dimness broken by great yellow rays. That was the place. But there was no child there. Only a big cruel looking cat with fangs and claws crawled about the place. Had it eaten the baby? Frightened and grieved, ready to cry for all his huge bulk, Matvei Chirsanov, a man of forty, prepared to get rid of the cat. The cat stuck its teeth and claws into his hand — the hand he had kept under his cheek and which was going numb. Matvei raised his hand and struck the cat against the ground with all his might. And the cat, crushed, disappeared suddenly. And as suddenly Matvei found the baby: there it was quite safe, clean and healthy-looking. The fisherman laughed, picked up the baby and went on his way gaily, happily. But suddenly it grew cold! What a severe frost! The trees in the wood creaked and moaned; the storm whirled; the earth shook! "Matvei! Matvei!" his wife shrieked in terrible despair.

Matvei Chirsanov awoke, leapt to his feet and swallowed a mouthful of salt water. He was in the water — in a whirling column of water that kept rolling, and rolled him over in the process — with outstretched arms, legs up and head down. A wild churning movement of the water, a vibration which shook his body like jelly swirled

close by, then drew away under the water with a deep-toned, obstinate noise. Matvei was swimming upwards, not knowing how much longer he could keep from filling himself with water, how long he would have to swim until he reached the surface. And would he ever reach it?

Suddenly, he felt the foam whirling round him and came to the surface — to the air. Ah! how good the air was, how good to be able to breathe! What happiness to be alive! But it was happiness mixed with fear. Where were the others? What about the fishing-boats? They had been very near each other. The ship which had run them down was receding in the distance — though it could still be seen like a black monster with a few dots of light — no more. The boats were nowhere. There was only a strip of white foam in the dark night on the dark water.

Suddenly Matvei's heart pounded madly. He was afraid. Where were they? Why was there no sound? Why was there no one in sight? He gave a hoarse cry in a strange voice which surprised him. He called to the others, but no one answered him. He stopped calling them, for fear choked him. How long would it be until daytime? Was the night at its beginning or was it nearing its end? How long would he have to swim until dawn? And would anyone catch sight of him at dawn? Would they look for him? Nobody knew what had happened. They could not know; was there anyone to tell them anything? Nobody on the ship which had ridden over the three boats tied to each other had seen anything in that darkness punctuated only by rain and wind. The cutter of the brigade had gone to take the catch to the mother-ship and would be back only in the morning. How long was it till then?

Matvei did not know it was the middle of the night. All the better for him. He was a plucky man and thought: 'Why lose my head? I'll swim as long as I have the power to swim.' He had got over his fright by now and over the shock of that fearful awakening from sleep and from his dream.

He allowed himself to float. He pulled off his boots and let them sink. He took off his clothes and floated on the water naked. The water was cold and dark and tossed him up and down in its big, unrelenting roll. The cold gripped him. He felt the depth and the darkness of the depth under him. Between him and that remote place down below there was nothing but a cold vacuum. Matvei knew that the water was thirty fathom deep. For him, however, who was thirty times smaller than this depth, it might have been thirty thousand fathom — or only three. It was enough that he could not stand on tiptoe. Lower than that the endless dark depth, the chasm began; and it waited for you and dragged you down. It was from there that the possibility of drowning began — from the place the breadth of a finger beyond where you could reach.

He was alone, quite alone. He swam again but slowly, to save his strength, towards the place where he thought the fishing-boats had been. Maybe he would find some plank to hold on to. Maybe a life-belt. He swam slowly, anxiously, with wide movements, seeking, feeling in the water. It was cold, the water was cold.

He sought for a long time. He had to find something, he was thinking. But he found nothing. What did it matter? Go on swimming, Matvei. You mustn't even tell yourself you haven't found anything. But just go on seeking.

Where can the men be? 'Brothers — my brothers, Matvei thought choking with grief. They had been together in childhood, they came from the same village; he knew every one of them well. He swam slowly, tossed up and down ceaselessly on the waves. Take care where you're swimming, Matvei, take care you don't swim too far away, or they'll look for you in vain.

Slowly, very slowly, he got over those smothered sobs which could find no outlet. He got over the painful grief in his heart. He no longer thought of anything. He swam in expectation. His hand struck against something, and he was possessed by hope, by the expectation of deliverance. It was a short plank with splintered ends. It was no good. Matvei went on swimming. He was thinking: 'Shall I be drowned? Am I to die now, this very night?' He did not know. He went on swimming, feeling. He found another plank. That one was no good either. Then he found a life-belt floating on the water. He began to laugh. He passed it over his head and tied it round his chest and rested. It was only now he realized how cold he was. 'It doesn't matter,' he thought. 'In a few hours, it'll be dawn and the cutter'll come. It can't be the middle of the night. I slept for so long! In any case it must be after midnight. And this cork only fills with water after some hours. I'll be saved. I shan't die today. Perhaps another time.' And he began to laugh. But sadness swept over him again as he remembered his comrades who must be floating somewhere nearby on the dark waters — mangled, crushed, drowned. 'Why didn't we sleep with our life-belts on? Another time I'll not let the boys sleep without them,' Matvei thought and then remembered that you couldn't sleep with life-belts on. 'If we'd only been given hurricane lamps! If I'm saved, I'll give

that man in charge of the equipment the thrashing of his life...'

The sea rocked him to sleep. Now and again the crest of a wave broke around him and woke him up. Then Matvei went to sleep again, and dreamt. He said to his wife and children: 'Well, I've taken that baby where you wanted me to! And I've killed the cat to protect you from it.' And then he went to sleep again. Again he woke up, this time with his teeth chattering. How cold it was! He was indeed terribly cold. When you stay long in the sea, you freeze; your muscles go numb and your bones ache. A good thing you've the cork-belt on, for otherwise you couldn't swim; you'd sink with your arms all stiff. Heavens above, how long will this night last? A thousand years?

Yes! it does last for a thousand years. You go to sleep and wake up again; and again you go to sleep — you don't know how many times. Nor can you know the time that has passed — how long it will be till dawn. But it can't be much longer now. Yet there isn't a streak of light. Still darkness and the endless movement of the water. Oh! where are you, kind souls? Why don't you come? See, I'm here!

Don't howl like that, Matvei. Keep calm. There's no one to hear you anyway.

Matvei went to sleep again, waking at last to feel himself choking, his nostrils full of sea water. He struggled desperately. He was heavy, heavier than his body ought to be. And suddenly he understood. The cork had filled with water. He shook off the life-belt and it sank slowly, very slowly. Matvei, naked and alone, swam slowly his body benumbed with the cold. A sound came to him. What was it? Ah! his teeth were chattering. He was terribly, oh, terribly cold. He swam just

enough to keep himself above the water. Overhead a strip of starry sky could be seen through the clouds; the sky seemed paler. Soon now it would be morning, and the cutter would come. He wouldn't have much longer to wait. But Matvei went on waiting — waiting for the crimson flame along the horizon in the east to spread: a thin fiery strip at first, then a cupola, then a rounded red eye that looked at him, as if to say: 'See, I am giving you back your life!'

But the strip of sky became overcast. And again there was a greyish-black sooty darkness. Matvei now mumbled as he swam:

"No, I don't want to. Why should I? Why should I?" He felt terribly lonely. Naked and quite alone on the wide sea and the night was not yet over!

He died from exhaustion towards dawn. Died just about the time the *October Star* — a column of smoke issuing from her funnels and the wind spreading it horizontally over the water, with the searchlights shooting brilliant white darts into the greyish-blue light of early dawn — picked up her fishermen. And when they had climbed Jacob's ladder, upon the upper deck that streamed with water, the cranes, to a creaking of their winches and a great display of steam from under their wheels, hauled up the fishing-boats. Uncle Marinică, the boatswain, Prodan, Captain Nicolau and Pricop were operating the winches, for to haul up a fishing-boat tossed by the swell and swaying in the air was a difficult, even dangerous manoeuvre when every moment the fishing-boat could crash upon the deck, injuring or killing the men. That is why, as usual, Communist seamen and Nicolau who always volunteered — did this work; Preţiosu, too, should have offered his services, but he had been drinking hard during the night and

his hand was shaking. Pricop had whispered to him between his teeth:

"Get to bed, or you'll make a fool of yourself and do harm to us all..."

And now, with his hard eyes staring at Constantin's signals, he continued to manipulate the winch. And he could hear the drenched fishermen on the upper deck swearing fearfully in their anger at the red-tapists on land who had not given them hurricane lamps, or had given them lamps without chimneys. 'I must tell Vasiliu to be more careful,' he was thinking, his hands on the iron levers of the winch.

XXVI

The high wind and the rain soon subsided; in the morning, however, the sky was still cloudy, and the sea ash-grey and roughened by gusts of wind. The ship rose and fell heavily, following the big waves of a deep sea surge, returning only slowly to the place whence she had been driven by last night's gale. She rose over the hollows between the big billows of the surge until her red painted keel below the stern could be seen; then she fell between the waves, removing masses of seething foam and, at such moments, the helm and the screw showed out of the water, the latter turning with frantic uselessness in the air full of spray, rainbows and foam. Each time the screws rose out of the water, the whole ship vibrated and shook with their mad movement. The sea was unfriendly, rough and strange, and the sky was full of clouds whipped by the wind. It was chilly and dark and the water was of a purple-grey hue, cold and dismal-looking.

Captain Haralamb and Nicolau stood on the watch deck, both looking through their glasses for the cutters —grey dots on the horizon swept by the wind. But how can one make out a grey dot amidst the fretting grey billows under a sky of grey? And yet, now and again, they discovered a cutter coming towards the ship with her boats in tow appearing on top of a wave, then disappearing, to be seen again oscillating with the heaving of the next wave.

The captain looked around as if in search of something, then cast his eyes below at the forecastle deck. Eight yards beneath them, the fishing-boats which had been floating around the vessel the night before were now on deck, tied with ropes and covered with their own canvas, while the light-hearted and idle fishermen argued amongst themselves in loud voices and laughed heartily at the words of Emelian Romanov, which the wind soon swept away. The captain cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted out Emelian's name. When the latter raised his eyes, he signalled to him to come up. Romanov said something to the others which made them laugh still more and disappeared. A few moments later he was mounting the straight iron steps leading to the bridge.

"Romanov," the captain said, "look over there, for you see better with your naked eyes than we with our glasses, and tell us if that cutter isn't coming up without her boats."

A fierce gust of wind darkened the face of the sea and drove a few wave crests over the water. Romanov looked into the distance to the point where the grey water and the white crests of the waves blended and moved without cessation. For a short interval he remained motionless, with a face as if

carved in stone, then turned towards the captain saying:

"They've left their boats behind all right."

"Impossible," Haralamb snapped. "Impossible ! Are they mad?"

Emelian did not answer, only looked around. The cutters which had already brought back their fishing-boats advanced slowly in the wake of the ship, bobbing up and down like corks on the seething water. A little further away another cutter was coming up, with three boats in tow that were lined up like black ants, climbed a hill of water, glided down into the valley and disappeared; and then, there they were again, ascending painstakingly. The fishing-boats were empty: the men had boarded the cutter and could be seen holding on to the stays of the mast. The captain turned towards Nicolau:

"Slow down for them."

Nicolau pushed the handle of the "telegraph" half-way. Almost immediately, the needle moved along the dial showing the engine room was responding to the order. The vibration of the ship grew less, then ceased altogether. Nothing was felt then but a swaying on the waves, the fall into empty space, the downward glide, the dizzying ascent upon the surge's crest, and then a fall again...

"There's another coming that way," Romanov said pointing to the south-west. The captain raised his glasses and a few moments after murmured:

"What the hell... this one too seems to be without her boats. Have they all gone mad?"

Romanov narrowed his eyes to look at the horizon and said:

"It's not one of ours... It's from Constantza..."

The captain looked at him closely as if he had been a strange thing, then gave him a friendly smile:

"Listen, Romanov, when you don't need those eyes of yours any more let me have them..."

Romanov did not answer. He was flattered but an open sea fisherman does not betray his satisfaction easily. Moreover, the captain had left him standing there and had gone over to the farther end of the watch deck to look again at the cutter which was returning unexpectedly without her fishing-boats. What had she done with them? Had she left them at sea? Had she lost them? The rockets fired by the vessel in the morning meant that all the cutters had to bring their boats on board; how had these men answered the signal? The captain wanted to speak to Nicolau of his concern for the men of those boats, fearing some misfortune had befallen them, but in accordance with his old habit he remained silent, saying no more than was strictly necessary. So he went on scanning the distance, sad and moody. Nicolau stood by him watching the cutter which Emelian had said was from Constantza. Lately Nicolau had developed a certain resemblance to the captain — was as morose and bitter as he. Nobody now heard him shout. He wandered about as if in search of something — waiting for something. He had not lost confidence, but he had lost patience. 'After all,' he was thinking at that moment, 'after all, the comrades on the regional committee have enough on their hands as it is; we'll not wait for them; we'll fight on our own; actually we went into battle last night... we'll keep on fighting, for things can't go on like this any more. They can't — all this must be put an end to,' he told himself resolutely, frowning with annoyance upon the cutter from Constantza as she drew nearer, disappearing between

the waves, reeling like a drunkard and butting her nose into the waves she cleft and changed into curtains of spray. The cutter that should have brought in her fishing-boats was sailing against the wind and making her way with difficulty; she was still about a mile away, when the Constantza cutter veered without lessening her speed and drew a foaming semi-circle around the poop of the *October Star*, after which she stopped her engines and drew more slowly towards the high, grey iron sides of the ship. As usual, a long row of heads bent over the rail. Some six to eight yards below, the cutter, rising on the waves and falling into the empty spaces between them, rolled to such an extent that it seemed as if she would come in contact with the sides of the big boat and break her mast. In her present position, the metal structure of the *October Star* defended her from the wind; and the waves were less fringed with foamy crests, but the deep sea surge was the same; the *Star* rose and fell on the hilly slopes of water. When the wave receded towards the dark, grey-green depths, the Plimsoll line was seen, as well as the layer of seaweed stuck to the side of the ship. Then the *October Star* dived again and the water once more concealed the weeds and tiny shells which stuck to the iron.

When the cutter drew near, the heads of all those looking on were bent attentively: it was to be no easy task. The same wave that raised the *October Star* a couple of yards, took down the cutter two yards from its former position on its other incline. What audacious fellow would dare to seize the ladder at such a moment when he could be left suspended in the air with the cutter's deck two yards below, and be crushed between the cutter and the ship, on the slightest contact of the two vessels?

On the cutter's deck, their legs fixed firmly between coils of cable, the helmsman and a fellow in town clothes had each seized a gaff and, whenever the cutter threatened to butt into the ship, they pushed with all their might against the side of the *October Star*. 'That fellow in the shabby navy-blue suit that he wears anyhow knows how to handle a gaff all right though as a townsman he probably never handled one in his life before,' thought Pricop who, not being on watch, had come out of his cabin and was looking over the rail. The stranger was a man between thirty and thirty-five years of age. From the distance he looked much taller than the helmsman, as he stood on the deck of the cutter which rose and fell with the waves like a lift gone mad. And he was broad-shouldered too. Curly hair came out in a tuft on his forehead from under his cap pushed far back on his neck though the face itself looked severe and was deeply furrowed about the mouth. He must be a determined man, as seen by the set expression of his face when he pushed with the gaff. For several moments Pricop followed the attempts of the two men to keep the cutter near enough to the boat to enable one of them, probably the civilian, to take hold of the ladder. It seemed to him as if they were wasting too much time. He was an old sailor and he could not keep back a shout which he transmitted with his hands cupped about his mouth:

"Hi, catch it and climb ! What are you waiting for?"

The man in blue clothes looked up to see who had spoken. For a moment his eyes rested on Pricop. Then his attention was again claimed in preventing the cutter from colliding with the ship. He exchanged a few words with the mecanic, dropped the gaff, waited for the wave to rise, then took a leap and clung to the rope-ladder

which was wet and blackened with tar. At the same time, the screws of the cutter began to revolve, and a narrow, quickly widening strip of water appeared between the cutter and the ship. Still clinging to the ladder, the fellow in the navy-blue suit signalled to the helmsman; the latter handed up to him a pasteboard suit-case. Immediately after the cutter had drifted away. The bubbling water at the poop mixed with the blue smoke issuing from the exhaust pipe of the engine. The stranger climbed the ladder swiftly while the cutter sailed away on the rough, grey sea streaked with thick white crests of foam. It was a dreary dismal day; columns of black smoke issued from the funnel of the *October Star* and chased over the dark sea.

Climbing the rail, the newcomer jumped on deck and went up the stairway. The first man he spoke to was Pricop Danilov who unexpectedly found himself face to face with him.

"Where do I find the Comrade Captain?" he asked seeming to take little note of him through his half-closed eyelids. Pricop told him where he would find the captain, upon which the man thanked him and continued mounting the steps. Pricop stood looking after him and then over the water. It seemed a strange day to him, with a poor light, but on the other hand the wind was cold, strong and invigorating. A dull day. Suddenly his heart began to pound. At first he had not recognized him. Now, however, he knew who the newcomer was. What business had he on board ship?

The man climbed to the bridge, his pasteboard suit-case in his hand, and went up to Captain Haralamb:

"Comrade Captain? I have been sent as a Party instructor to your ship by the regional committee. Here are my papers."

Haralamb shook his hand without looking at him, perused the papers quickly and handed them back to him.

After which he measured him from head to foot with a melancholy look that was not without benevolence, as he said:

"You'll be able to help us. We need it..."

He looked thoughtfully at this fellow with the well-worn, crumpled clothes, which hung on him as if they had been hurriedly thrown on a peg; he was an unusually tall and broad-shouldered man with deep-set eyes under his eyebrows and with cheeks that were furrowed, though not by age. What would he be able to do? Well, we shall see, we shall see. Captain Haralamb sighed as he repeated:

"Yes, we need it..."

The newcomer had listened attentively, though he said nothing. The commander called out:

"Comrade Nicolau... here's a comrade from the regional committee."

Nicolau had heard the few words exchanged between them. He continued looking through his glasses at the cutter that was arriving without her boats, now not more than half a mile off. But he did not see her. He was moved. So he had come. But what kind of a man was he? Weren't there weak ones too among the militants? Enough of them. Maybe this one was. Nicolau lowered his glasses and replied:

"The cutter hasn't lost any of her crew, Comrade Captain. Look, the fishermen are all on board. They've left their boats and boarded her."

Then he turned towards the newcomer and held out his hand:

"Come along with me, Comrade, and let me find you a cabin where to leave your luggage... Will you be with us for long?"

He was already descending the steps. He stopped and half turned round, looking at the newcomer questioningly. He alone knew what was in his heart. The stranger answered:

"As long as I am needed."

"Aha!" Nicolau exclaimed and continued his way down the steps, followed by the other man who carried his battered pasteboard suit-case.

"There isn't much room," Nicolau said again. "It'll be difficult... but we'll manage somehow. Maybe you'll sleep in Comrade Preţiosu's cabin — he's secretary of the Party branch," Nicolau explained.

"I know about him, where's his cabin?"

"Over there, at the far end..."

"And the men, where do they sleep?"

"Here, on the forecastle deck..."

"Give me a bed there, Comrade."

Nicolau stopped in his descent and gave him a long look, then asked:

"A bed? Not a cabin?"

"No cabin, just a bed...on the forecastle deck."

"Aha," Nicolau exclaimed a second time going on his way; followed by the stranger still carrying his suit-case.

They passed among the fishermen; the latter were speaking to one another and took no heed of them. The newcomer looked at them with strained attention as if he wanted to make out something on their weather-beaten faces. As far as they were concerned he was non-existent. Emelian Romanov was speaking in a loud voice surrounded by men who gave loud guffaws. The stranger stopped for a moment to look at Emelian, then went on in Nicolau's steps.

XXVII

A strong gust of wind turned the crests of the waves into spray. Broken purple clouds from which hung grey streaks chased above the *October Star* which rose on the big waves of the swell and fell heavily into the empty spaces. Not far off the cutter coming without the fishing-boats that had been entrusted to her rose and fell on the hills of water. She was coming ever nearer the grey side of the ship. A voice like thunder — Nicolau's — was heard from the bridge coming through the tin horn of the speaking-tube.

"Take care you don't hit the cutter! What are you doing on board?"

Unshaven and wet, the fishermen on the deck of the cutter laughed disrespectfully, and even with clumsy defiance, as they held on to the steel rigging of the mast; they signalled to him to keep calm for nothing untoward would happen. With their hands and gaffs they kept at a distance the iron sides of the *October Star* which rose and fell with every wave the height of a one-storeyed house. Pushing with their hands, the fishermen let the side of the ship slip under their palms; and the same wave that raised the cutter took the big vessel down into its depth by as many yards.

Then one of the fishermen shouted something to the others and, awaiting a favourable moment, they all clung to the wide ladder climbing it together, shoulder to shoulder, their prickly beards pointing upwards — some eight or nine of them, some of them barefoot and with trousers rolled up, others with rubber boots from which the handle of a knife stuck out.

The chief engineer looked at them from the cabin deck with the usual twist in his face which expressed the

wisdom brought by disappointment and disgust blended with childish good-humour.

"Look at them, Pricop," he was saying, "look at the pirates storming our factory."

"It's not right to call them pirates," Pricop said. "They're workers."

The "pirates" climbed the rails and jumped on to the deck. The cutter below had sailed away towards the ship's poop, where, at a few hundred yards' distance from the vessel, the other cutters which had brought the fishing-boats laden with fish to the *October Star* were being tossed on the high waves.

The fishermen who had chatted quietly till then now assailed the newcomers with jeering questions:

"Have you come back to your *Mummy*?" Emelian Romanov, his hands in his pockets, barefoot and his cap pushed far back, shouted. "For another little rest, eh? And what about your boats? Have ye gambled them away?"

"They've come here to crowd the store-room," Iermolai complained. "There won't be room for anyone now, because of them..."

The captain's voice, gruffer than usual, and which the metal horn made sound like thunder, asked from the bridge: "What have you done with the boats? Where are they?"

Pricop came down and mixed among them. He wanted to know what had happened. Because something had certainly happened. That was clearly seen by the guilty and defiant faces of the men of the brigade. Were Emelian and the others right? Could it be that?

Luca Gheorghe, with his fair little beard ruffled by the wind, shouted: "It's disgraceful! It's a disgrace for all of us, to hell with you! "

Emelian Romanov laughed showing his teeth like a wolf:

"Oh, it's a long time since they've felt any shame! They don't care what you say to 'em!"

The newcomers objected to this, waving their hands about and counting on their fingers calloused by the oars and the fishing-lines; and one replied:

"Clever, aren't you? But we were the farthest away. Five hours' sail from *Mother*. If anything went wrong with the engine what'ud we have done with the boats in tow?"

"Of course," Emelian Romanov said, "of course, you might have got wet with the rain drops. And there's a wind too, which could have given you a cold in your noses."

The upper deck rose and fell under their feet without cease. The wind whistled sharply in the rigging and the smoke from the ship chased over the water, being immediately dispersed by the wind. The fishermen stood on deck with their legs wide apart steadying themselves when the vessel pitched and rolled; and they argued among themselves, some of them good-humouredly, some indignatly, and the others embarrassed but insolent:

"If you'd been where we were, Emelian Romanov, you might have spoken," Simion Danilov said, for he was one of the newcomers.

"Pshaw!" Emelian answered contemptuously shrugging his shoulders.

"Yes, yes! you say pshaw, but you ought to have been there, with *Mother* nowhere in sight, and the wind blowing us to the open sea to the back of nowhere. We might have got to where we were last spring when it washed us ashore in Bulgaria."

"We might have perished," one of the men mumbled from behind those who had spoken so far.

Emelian Romanov answered:

"And if you had? What are you, after all? Don't you call yourself open sea fishermen? Don't you know what our job's like? Bah! to hell with you, you're just a lot of shaky old pensioners!" And he spat on the floor in front of them.

The newcomers looked down to where Romanov had spat, and then at Romanov who looked at them with a cold stare, his hands in his pockets. Simion's eyes glowed and he took a step forward, ready for a fight. The men gathered round them closely: some of them — Iermolai, Andrei and Cosma — around Emelian, while the others, the newcomers, rallied round Simion. Luca Gheorghe looked at them in turn, wondering whether he should not intervene and separate them. But it was the interference of a voice that broke the tension and prevented the fight.

"I don't agree with Romanov," the voice said.

It was the voice of the stranger who had come from Constantza. A moment before, he had been standing on the upper deck, near the captain who had pointed out to him the fishermen crowding the deck, under the tarred prows of the boats, near the hatch leading to the factory below.

"Look at them. That's the spirit here. They've left the boats and have come for shelter to the vessel. Are they men?"

To the captain's surprise, the instructor answered him:

"Of course they are. They're not to blame."

The captain opened his mouth to say something but the instructor had already gone down the steps at

a quick pace. Now he was among the fishermen, taller than any of them, except Cosma, looking a stranger and out of place in his cheap town clothes and shoes.

The newcomer felt no awkwardness whatever. Indeed, he seemed very much at home among these tall, sunburnt fellows in their faded overalls, with their big beards and broad shoulders, and whom he resembled in some vague way. He stood among men who came from Danilofca and Sf. Gheorghe and Mangalia and said:

"Emelian Romanov is not right. That's how fishing went on in the old days. In the old days when the men were left to drown. Now in times of danger they return to the ship and haul their boats on board with cranes, and find safety themselves. Isn't that so?"

The men were silent. Yes, it was so. Facts are facts; and, if it's true, what can you say?

"There is something else though," the civilian continued. "Who said he might have been drowned? Is this a wind that could bring destruction to man or boat?"

A cold gust of wind swept over them, the rigging gave a prolonged moan, like the chords of a sad violin. The ship fell heavily into the empty space between two masses of water. The fishermen had become silent. They were listening. Emelian Romanov looked carefully at the newcomer, as if he was trying to bring back an old memory. Nor could Simion Danilov take his eyes off the stranger's face. Simion spoke hesitatingly but in jeering tones:

"It's clear that you're a land lubber. You've come from the office and now you're on this big ship...but down below on the sea in our boats it's different..."

Some of the men laughed. Making his way with dignity among them, Pricop, the comrade chairman of the trade-union branch, advanced towards the newcomer.

"I understand them," he said. "The weather was bad. Actually the vessel should have been ten miles nearer them. We allowed it to drift too much out if its course," he added keeping his eyes off the newcomer.

The civilian from Constantza looked sharply at Pricop, then, as if he had not heard him, turned towards Simion and said coldly and in tones as mocking as the latter's had been:

"Is it different down below in the fishing-boat? Is it? Is it different on the sea? But when the men worked on a small fishing-boat owned by the kulak, using the kulak's fishing-line, what did they do in such weather? Did they leave the boat and come on board ship?"

"Haw, haw, haw," Iermolai laughed gruffly. "There was no ship then! And the kulak would have sworn himself blue!"

Simion stood with downcast eyes. Emelian said nothing. He kept his eyes fixed on the stranger, thinking God knows what.

The newcomer continued admonishing Simion who seemed angry and confused. He went on:

"And what did they do if they lost the fishing-line? They paid for it. The kulak brought a suit against them and they paid. And if they lost the fishing-boat, they also lost their lives. Now your life is safe. But you care less for the property of the people than for that of the kulak. Is that right? Do you want the State to make you responsible? It could, you know. There's a law and there are judges. But we say that the State's property is our own property," he said speaking to the others, not to Simion.

Simion felt the lash and drew back among the others, shrugging his shoulders contemptuously:

"As if I was the only one. Speak to these others too, for there were nine of us."

"But you were responsible for the brigade," Luca Gheorghe answered sharply.

The stranger looked at the others who were feeling awkward, ashamed, and at the same time wrathful.

"The fact is that the others shouldn't have allowed the man in charge to do as he pleased when they saw that he was letting them down."

Simion defended himself heatedly, looking the newcomer in the face and speaking aggressively:

"Those who speak from safety can afford to be clever... but on the sea it's different..."

The stranger looked at him, his narrowed eyes becoming sharply penetrating. Then he gave a short dry laugh:

"Yes, you're right... it's different on the sea..."

After which he added calmly, though raising his voice:

"Who's coming to get the boats?"

There was silence. The vessel rose and fell under their feet.

The men swayed with her to keep their balance. The wind whistled ceaselessly, blowing sometimes in whirlwinds. It was a grey bleak day, with the sea like lead, bespattered with millions of foaming crests. The dreary moan of the wind could be heard in the rigging of the foremast.

The fishermen looked at the cutters that disappeared again and again between the waves; they looked at the horizon whose line moved up and down without cessation

with the movement of the deck, and remained silent. Emelian Romanov finally spoke:

"I'll come."

"And I," Luca Gheorghe said, still more curtly.

Cosma, the huge lad, said:

"I too."

After him the men of Iermolai's brigade came forward. Andrei, the kid, was the first, then Iermolai, then another:

"We're all coming."

The stranger raised his hand.

"Too many. Six men'll be enough."

Then he turned towards Nicolau:

"Will you give us a boat..."

Nicolau gave a start and said hurriedly:

"Yes, Comrade! We'll give you a boat, two if you like..."

The stranger looked at him for a moment, turned round and began to talk first with Emelian, then with Luca Gheorghe. The rumble of the winches could be heard. The cables rose taut over the deck. The sailors wound hempen ropes round a fishing-boat. Uncle Marinică, the boatswain, signalled with his hands to the two winch operators; the boat was soon in mid air, swinging away from the ship over the tossing sea.

Pricop returned to the cabin deck, his head bent and looking thoughtful. Passing the chief engineer who had witnessed the whole scene as he stood resting his elbows on the rails, he heard him chirping:

"Tew, tew, tit! Have you seen, Pricop? Have you seen, kid?"

"What was there to see?"

"Why, the red-tapist at work."

"Aye, I've seen him..."

"That one's been a seaman too. He's a seaman all right, the hell of a son of a sea-bitch... D'ye remember when the boys on the *Arabella Robertson* mutinied on their way to Bahia Blanca? When they wanted to throw Vasiliu, the mate, overboard? D'you remember that Norwegian who started the row? This one's different, he's decent; but he's the devil of a hard'un for all that. I should like to go with them..."

"Look at that one, now."

With the boat just above the deck, Cosma had caught hold of the rope and climbed into it, although it was swinging dangerously in the air. Now, with his feet planted in the boat, he grasped a gaff and kept the boat from any destructive impact against the side of the ship.

Slowly, very slowly, the cables slipped along the pulleys; slowly, very slowly, the boat neared the water. Suddenly, a tall wave struck it, its crest breaking against its sides, surrounding it with white lines of foam. Then it withdrew and left it still in the air. Another yard of cable and the fishing-boat was tossing on the sea. Cosma made a dash to untie the rope; a moment later the coil of rope swung free, rising to the height of the foremast, and the fishermen were coming down Jacob's ladder which Cosma had secured with his gaff. The stranger strode over the rails and disappeared on the other side. Pricop was silent, preoccupied and thoughtful. The chief engineer went away serene, and chirping like a bird.

On the sea below the fishing-boat was tossing on the waves with a man to an oar and two to a seat. Leaning backwards as they pulled, and straining every muscle, the boat moved away from the ship on the grey sea roughened by the wind, the waves hurling it up and down.

As they approached the cutter which was to take them back to the fishing grounds, Cosma touched the shoulder of the stranger from Constantza who was rowing on the seat in front of him:

"You're a fisherman too, aren't you?"

Emelian Romanov answered for him:

"He's from our village... you wouldn't know him. You were a child..."

The stranger turned and looked at Emelian from the corner of his eye, but did not speak.

"I recognized you," Emelian murmured. "You're Adam Jora who went out fishing with my father... You've changed, but I recognized you..."

The tall grey ship with her slender masts and smoking funnels was left behind. She could be seen rising and falling on the big waves of the surge, while they themselves were flung about by even the smallest waves, sometimes buried in green-grey crystal funnels through which they could only see the lowering sky and the masts of the *October Star.*

"I recognized you," Romanov murmured again, "for you were a devil of a kid... D'you remember the thrashing I once gave you?"

"I'd called Iachint's girl names and you were courting her," Adam murmured with a faint smile. He was rowing shoulder to shoulder with Emelian but did not look at him. He asked: "How is Iachint's girl?"

"I married her... we've big kids..."

"Good luck to them."

"Good luck to you... Any young'uns yourself?"

"I've no one," Adam answered curtly.

Emelian went on rowing in silence. They had taken the biggest and heaviest fishing-boat, the waves were high and the wind was no help—so it was none too easy

to row. And then Emelian was troubled. He spoke softly.

"Have you forgiven us?" And he looked furtively at him.

Pulling at the oars with all his might, Adam Jora replied: "You, I forgave you long ago."

XXVIII

While the cutter, the fishing-boat, Adam, Emelian and the others disappeared in the grey distance flecked with the fluffy black clouds, Simion Danilov looked for his brother. He found him alone, his elbows resting on the iron rail, looking down into the dark, blackish-green waves out of which clouds of air bubbles spurted up whenever they struck the side of the ship. The upper deck rose and fell under them as they stood by one another: one a barefoot, ragged, unshaven, tousled, savage-looking fisherman, for he was more slovenly than any of the others, so that people might forget he was a kulak's son — and the other, the always clean-shaven, sturdy and neat seaman in overalls, stained and old enough, which were, however, freshly washed and ironed. Pricop threw his brother a passing glance, then went on looking at the sea. Simion, riggling his dirty toes with their long tar-tipped nails, asked:

"Did you see him?"

"I did," Pricop answered solemnly.

"How the devil did he become a Communist?"

Pricop was silent. Simion murmured thoughtfully:

"After all, those are the sort of people who do become..."

"You shut up," Pricop mumbled.

Simion said:

"And you be careful!"

"Why should I be careful?" Pricop murmured with a cold smile.

Simion's eyes opened wide.

"Are you mad? D'you think he's forgotten? D'you think he's forgiven us?"

"That's his concern," Pricop said quietly, adding:

"We're used to this kind of people... Now, get going, nobody must see us talking together..."

Simion moved away looking unconcerned, while Pricop continued in his brown study, his elbows resting on the cold iron, his eyes fastened on the waves. Then he, too, went away to look for Preţiosu.

In the evening, under a sooty sky, the cutter returned with the boats which had been found riding at anchor, and tossing over a depth of some thirty fathom. The fishermen had taken out their lines and had also brought in fish. Now, tired, they remanied on deck to see the boats hauled up, while Adam Jora, pale and with lines of fatigue under his eyes, his clothes wet, went to the store-room to ask for overalls and rubber boots. The diminutive store-keeper, with his pale, wizened face, his shaven pate, told him he hadn't any. So Adam Jora remained in his wet clothes, shaking with cold, and went to look for one of the members of the Party branch bureau. He found Preţiosu and Pricop who greeted him politely though reservedly. Pricop looked at Adam's wet clothes but did not say anything. Adam asked when a meeting of the bureau could be called so that he might be informed of everything. "Whenever you want, even now," they answered.

"Are you the only two in the bureau?" Adam asked. "I seem to have heard there was also a Comrade Prodan."

"Prodan is on watch," Preţiosu said.

"Then we'll wait until he's off duty."

"But we'll be on duty then," Pricop said, not wanting to have Prodan by when he would be speaking to Adam of certain things.

"Then I'll talk things over with him separately and I'll tell you what he says."

The two exchanged glances. Who knew what Prodan might have to say; and whatever it was it would be better for them to know...

"I'll go and see if he can come," Pricop said simply, and went out.

Preţiosu began to speak to Adam in his complaining voice, closing an eye to keep out the smoke of that eternal cigarette stuck in the corner of his mouth.

"Prodan is a good comrade, but he's easily influenced by a crowd on the boat, Comrade Jora..."

"What crowd?" Adam asked.

"Well, you'll see for yourself: I don't want to tell you; you'll very quickly see for yourself. There's a crowd of 'em, Comrade; unfortunately it includes Party members who are influenced to the bad; yes, yes, to the bad..."

"Which Party members? And who influences them?"

"Prodan's one of 'em, and then there's Comrade Nicolau, the mate, and Uncle Marinică, the boatswain, and Manea, a mechanic... But the organization got wind of it and made them toe the line; we've criticized them very severely, Comrade, you know; very severely..."

"But what have they done? And what is it they want?"

"To break away from the organization, Comrade, to side with the captain and rise against the Party..."

"What's that? The captain on board this ship wants to take a different line from the Party?"

Preţiosu smiled meaningly:

"Oh, you're young... er — just how old are you?"

"Thirty..."

"Good luck to you and a long life! I'm nearly fifty myself and have been in touch with the workers' movement ever since the early thirties... I know their kind. D'you think that in their heart of hearts they love our regime? Of course not, Comrade..."

Adam Jora smiled drily as he said:

"I don't know what goes on in the captain's heart but — what does the staff section of the enterprise say? And judging by facts, how exactly does the captain behave?"

"Oh, well, if you judge from the way he behaves..."

"Bah! if you judge by other things... it'ud be..." Adam Jora's words trailed off as if he hadn't wished to say anything in particular. The other opened his eyes wide. He was offended.

"Oh, well, on this ship it's necessary to be vigilant, Comrade," he said slowly, meaning: 'You are none too vigilant, my fine lad!'

Not an eyelid of Adam Jora's flickered.

"Very well. Be vigilant. But what actually is the stand adopted by these comrades you were speaking of? And what is the captain's stand in particular?"

"I've told you before: they're breaking away from the organization. They don't follow the Party line."

"In what problems and what is it they really want? Or what don't they want?" Adam Jora asked. Then, seeming to think for a moment, he asked Preţiosu point-

blank as if he had struck his fist against his chest: "And what is the Party line?"

Preţiosu was astounded; he took his cigarette out of his mouth and looked at him:

"What d'you mean — what is the Party line?"

"Yes, what are the Party's objectives here in the fishing fleet?" Adam Jora asked in great earnestness, keeping his eyes fastened on Preţiosu.

The latter was flummoxed and found no ready answer. Really, he didn't know. He'd never thought of it, apart from which he had never been interested to know. Trying to get out of his embarrassment, he began putting on superior airs towards Adam:

"What d'you mean by that, Comrade," he said, "d'you think the Party has one objective in the country, and another in the fleet?"

And he gave an ironic laugh. Adam laughed too, though mirthlessly.

"I believe no such thing... I only wanted to know just what concrete forms the Party's objectives take here in the fishing fleet..."

"To begin with, the fleet is no concern of ours. We're the Party branch on the ship. And in the second place, do you want us to discuss the situation like this, thinking things out as we go along? We must discuss everything seriously, in an organized way, at a meeting and not like this..." Which meant: 'You're flighty, my boy, playing about with serious Party problems like this; why, you don't even know the method of work, therefore you aren't a good militant.' That's what Preţiosu told Adam Jora, though covertly, as he looked at him through the cigarette smoke, dissatisfied and superior, like an older man resenting to be taught by greenhorns.

Adam Jora's brow darkened. 'Yes, an instructor was necessary here,' he thought. 'There was something wrong, certainly.' But aloud, as he looked at Preţiosu somewhat regretfully, he said:

"I think that even if someone woke you up in the night and asked what the Party's objectives are at your place of work, you should know them and be able to state them in a few words. For the objectives are clear, Comrade! And it seems rather strange to me that you should separate political work on board ship from the political work among fishermen..."

"It's the Party which has organized it thus," Preţiosu put in, coldly and stiffly.

"The Party can organize things differently if we show them the need of it. Did you think of telling the people at the Party organization, did you now?"

"You seem to have come here to judge us," Preţiosu said. He had got the wind up and was becoming sour. "First see how we carry on our work, analyse it, and then decide if you should go on with your criticizing..."

"Don't be offended; of course we'll discuss and analyse and see what there's to be done about it..." Adam said calmly.

At that moment Pricop and Prodan entered the room. Pricop had taken some time looking for Prodan, to give Preţiosu the chance to speak to Adam about the men in the organization, and especially about the crew, so that Adam should already have a pre-arranged outlook on it all, carefully fashioned by them. When he entered with Prodan, and Adam greeted and shook hands with the helmsman, Pricop looked sharply at Preţiosu and saw that he was changed, almost imperceptibly, true, but his face now looked different somehow. He was

perspiring, seemed embarrassed and a trifle... yes — though Pricop didn't care to believe it, a trifle shaken. Would Adam Jora prove superior to his fellows, would they be unable to manage him? If so, they would have to trip him up from the very beginning so as to force Prodan to hold his trap. For otherwise Prodan might consider he had finally found a man he could talk to openly. Pricop sat down and began to speak in a solemn and benevolent tone:

"Comrade Jora, before our meeting, I should like to tell you a few things, you know, in a comradely spirit. Don't take them the wrong way, please. I should like to speak to you openly, to help you, for you are new to this and perhaps will make mistakes if we don't help you with our criticism now."

He made a moment's pause.

"Out with it, Comrade, don't be so long-winded," Adam Jora interposed. "Must you ask permission to criticize anyone?"

"Oh, no, it isn't that," Pricop said with a smile; "but there are some comrades who... you know how they are... especially when they are sent from headquarters... well, criticism from below isn't always pleasant..." which was to say: 'Maybe you, too, are one of those swollen-headed chaps, who won't allow others to criticize them, who considers himself the big man and refuses to accept the criticism of a humble man such as myself, such as we all are here; and if you won't accept what I tell you, it also means that you won't accept criticism and that you belittle the basic working method in the Party.'

Adam Jora understood it all very well. But not an eyelid did he flicker to show he had done so; neither did he answer. Pricop went on:

"You see... this morning when you went after those boats... that was all very well. We understand. You're a good comrade who won't suffer the State's property to be lost. But you should have looked a little further. To begin with you didn't talk things over with us. Now, it's not right that you should take an initiative all alone. And then, there's something else. It's all right your saving the boats; only you gave no thought to the most precious capital, Comrade — to man. And if the men had been drowned? Was it worth endangering their lives to save the boats? You see, that was a mistake. And we are sorry you did it on the very first day you set foot on board. Henceforward the men will look upon you as a good, courageous comrade, but one who doesn't care a hang for their lives; and that's not as it should be. A Communist cannot carry on his political work without caring for the men."

He had concluded calmly, even with kindliness, and there was about him something reminiscent of a teacher speaking to a naughty child. His reprimand, however, had been so many strokes with the club. The very fact that he and Preţiosu could use such a tone towards a regional committee instructor showed that the instructor had placed himself in a position of inferiority which did not fit in with his task. And what kind of a Party instructor was a man who risked the men's lives, made decisions by himself and, what is more, made them on the very first moment of his arrival? Being recalled was a danger that threatened him like a sword hanging by a very thin thread.

Adam understood both the danger and the hostility. 'This man's against me,' he told himself. 'But is he against me only? If so, that doesn't count. Of course it's not right that he should be hostile to a comrade,

still one can get along with that. But if he's hostile to the instructor sent by the Party, it means that he has something to hide. I must stop here until I see things more clearly... And maybe after that...' Before coming over, he had read the relative file which informed him that two instructors sent to the ship the year before had been recalled and criticized; the third had left a report which spoke in general terms, and was favourable to the work carried on in the organization. Hadn't this third one deliberately refused to see things, and hadn't the other two been "sapped"? Adam Jora felt something stirring uncomfortably deep down within him. Injustice again? And again the Danilovs? Injustice within the Party organization, Communists "sapping" each other?

He had been silent for some time. Pricop smiled: he had hit him hard. He did not even need to look at Prodan to realize that Prodan had been shaken and would not now give the newcomer his confidence which he distributed so parsimoniously... Pricop said lightly:

"Well then, let's begin our discussion..."

Relieved and pleased, Preţiosu was about to open his mouth when Adam stopped him:

"No. Let me tell you first what I think."

"Please do," Preţiosu said waving his hand and speaking in a tone just faintly derisive.

"You, see, Comrade, I object to our taking up a Party slogan in order to strike at another slogan or to strike at an initiative. Today there was no problem of solicitude for man. The problem was to save socialist property. I've been a fisherman — Comrade Pricop Danilov knows me — and I know when men are likely to drown and when they're not. Had the danger been too great, I wouldn't have called upon them, and, maybe,

they themselves wouldn't have been so smart to come forward. But it was necessary to show the men there and then that they must be careful of their property, that they can't do as they like with it. Is that clear? Was a meeting necessary for that? Why didn't you take the initiative yourselves, on the spot? Where were the Communists? I found on board a fisherman and a Party member, one Luca Gheorghe, and a non-Party man, Emelian Romanov; it is with their help that I remedied the matter; did I sever from the masses those who had left the boats? D'you think that I was wrong to do what I did? I don't. And it'ud have been better if it hadn't been your own brother, Comrade Danilov, who, as head of the brigade, left the means of production at sea. But as it was him, you should criticize him and not the instructor of the regional committee, whose task is not to remedy an unsound situation among fishermen, left to go from bad to worse, but to help the organization in its work. And now let's start discussing things."

It was many years since he had last used his fists in a fight and he would never use them again. But he could struggle for all that — and just as well as ten years ago, if not better.

He had struck with a mallet, while his opponent had used a club. 'You must learn that it is not a question of myself in this matter but of your political work within a unit which produces for the people,' he was reflecting. Pricop had felt the blow. He had given a start when Adam had said "Comrade Danilov knows me," although before that he had behaved like a stranger and not like a man from the same village. But this was a trifle compared with the blow that had been struck at him through Simion. He had been foolish. Had forgotten to criticize his brother. 'That fool of a Simion will get me into troub-

le yet,' Pricop thought in a fright, and he answered quickly: "How d'you know I haven't criticized my brother? I have criticized him and ruthlessly too !"

"You should have criticized him openly, then, and not privately !"

"One moment, Comrade ! Let's discuss in an organized way," Preţiosu put in to cut Adam short.

Pricop smiled at Adam as he said:

"Well, if you will not accept our criticism, you're not obliged to."

"I think I was right not to leave things as they were," Adam said determinedly.

"And we think as we've just told you; but if you are offended, we can keep our criticism to ourselves..." Pricop interposed and laughed. "That was a good one you said just now: you have not come here to be criticized by us, but to criticize us..."

Adam too laughed — a cold, dry laugh:

"Well, let's begin our talk..."

There was no point in answering them further. He began asking questions about the work of the Party branch, about the problems arising in the organization, the men's problems, and the problems of production. The answers were desultory and lacked clarity — with a great many figures from which no real conclusion could be drawn. Several times he tried to draw Prodan into the discussion, but the latter spoke little—though when he did, his words were to the point and well thought out — afterwards receding into silence, to watch Adam with a thoughtful, inquiring look in his eyes. Pricop and Preţiosu finally asked Adam what he thought should be done, and what measures should be taken, but he avoided giving a precise answer and laughed as he said lightly:

"You were speaking about mistakes made on the first day, and you yourself would have me go wrong again. I can't say that I know the situation here thoroughly. Whatever I may propose would be 'improvisation.' For the present let me see the Party branch at work and later, when I know the men and the situation thoroughly, I'll tell you what should be done..."

They separated. Preţiosu and Pricop remained behind, Preţiosu not very pleased with himself:

"He thinks he's clever," he said, "but he'll see the stuff we're made of. What does he think? Does he take us for seamen new to their job who don't even know how to make a knot? We're old hands..."

"You're talking nonsense," Pricop said, thinking.

This Adam Jora was no longer the lanky youngster, strong as a bull, of former days; he had changed, grown older, with his strength concentrated within him. It was no joke. He had made fun of them to their face, telling them he had understood why they were asking for his advice: in order that they should misapply it, that things should go wrong and that they should be able to inform the regional committee that the instructor was messing up their work, getting them into holes, and so bring about his recall. And he had said it as if it were an innocent joke. He had said it openly and had warded off the peril. He was a dangerous man. He must be sent back at the soonest.

"He's got a swollen head, Sile," Pricop told Preţiosu. "He won't accept criticism. We must dispatch a letter to the regional organization, telling them about his putting his foot in it today. Tonight the fishing smack'll come with motor oil for the cutters and we'll send our letter."

"That's good," Preţiosu put in. "Shall we inform Prodan?"

"Let him have a rest," Pricop said with concern. "He's been on watch and is tired. Two members of the bureau are sufficient."

While Pricop and Preţiosu were hard at work on the letter in Preţiosu's cabin, weighing every word, Adam was tossing about in the dark in a hammock in the crew's sleeping quarters at the prow. There he lay in the intense heat while the sleeping men snored and the waves rose higher and higher... or glided down into deep, very deep hollows... until, as if by magic, they would again ascend. Adam was so troubled he could not sleep. He thought he had forgotten the past. He thought it was far away and that Danilofca and the men there no longer existed for him. From the files of the personnel he had examined before coming here, he knew he would run into Pricop. The file had it that he had broken with his father, the kulak, even before 1944 and that he had been a seaman, a worker toiling for a wage, without any other income. That was all. And now there was Pricop, a full-grown man, cold, daring and sly, who maybe concealed things darker than anyone suspected. And with him was Simion, Uliana's husband, a simple fisherman, in threadbare clothes. It was all torture for Adam, as he tossed about in his hammock. There was no point in lying to himself. He had hated them ever since his years of imprisonment, for at the trial he had realized to whom he owed his arrest. He hated them with all the strength in his body and would have liked to be a giant to trample underfoot their house with all of them inside it, as if it had been an ant's nest. 'And I can't, I can't even have my revenge,' he told himself as the never-ceasing pitch and roll of the boat swung him unrelentingly in his hammock. Sweating and with a burning head, he went on thinking: 'Not now at any rate. If they play straight, I'll not touch

a hair on their head; not harm them even in thought. I don't know them; they're strangers to me and I'm a stranger to them. If they're decent, hard-working chaps, I'll treat them fair. Certainly I'll never use the power I've been entrusted with to harm 'em. No! I never will try to get my own back,' he decided, grinding his teeth in a superhuman effort to suppress his hatred. His breath came with difficulty, impeded by the control he exerted upon himself. Then, momentarily, a great peace pervaded him and it seemed he had won the battle — controlled his hatred until suddenly the tide of it came up again, and he grew hot and perspired as the wrath and thirst for fierce revenge seized him anew, with the impulse to destroy, to crush, to hack, to tear asunder with his hands. 'What's up with me? What is it?' he asked himself horrified by this hatred whose depths he had never fathomed.

He tossed about all night. But the seamen who went off duty and came to have their sleep, and those who had to go on duty and woke up mumbling inarticulately and dressing in the dark, did not know that the man in the hammock by the door was not sleeping. There was one thing, however, that Adam knew, when, in the morning, he came out up on the upper deck wan with sleeplessness and passion; and that was that he would not use the power he had to revenge himself. He stood, his elbows resting on the rails, watching the fishing smack which had come overnight moving away on the grey, choppy sea, under a dark sky. He did not know that she took ashore a letter concerning himself.

Suddenly he heard a medley of furious voices on the poop deck and went to see what it was. A group of bearded fishermen in faded, blood-stained overalls smudged with tar were shaking their fists at Preţiosu.

They were pale and excited. Emelian Romanov's voice was raised above the others':

"What are ye here for? Tell us that: What are ye here for? What good do ye do, the whole b...lot of ye? Ye let 'em drown while you hold yer meetings, isn't that it? O God! The gutless blighters we've got here!"

There was grief and exasperation in his words as he roared them out.

Adam was astonished to see that this rough, grey-haired man was actually crying — the tears running down his face.

"What is it, brothers?" Adam asked coming among the fishermen. He heard Preţiosu shouting in annoyance:

"Will you leave me alone! We're the ship's organization and are not concerned with the fleet."

Luca Gheorghe turned round and answered Adam:

"Some of our men were drowned last night: Matvei Chirsanov's brigade. A ship rode them down."

And with a drawn and gloomy face and head bent in dejection he told him about the hurricane lamps.

Then, when the fishermen had gone to the storeroom to drown their sorrow, Preţiosu approached the two.

"How's this, Luca Gheorghe," he said angrily, "that you, as a Party member, side with the men and incite them against the organization? You're overstepping the mark, Comrade, and you'll answer for it!"

The insults and the curses the aggrieved fishermen had thrown at him had irritated him profoundly and he had to vent his anger upon someone. But Luca Gheorghe was suddenly inflamed:

"What? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? And what kind of Party work are *you* doing after all? The men get drowned because the fleet's interests are looked after by

robbers, and the likes of you, who just stay in safety and talk big. Rotters, the lot of you !" the fisherman snarled in a tone which silenced Preţiosu. The latter looked at Adam for support, but Adam looked away.

So Preţiosu drew away nursing his spite, thinking: 'You side with these ruffianly fishermen, do you? Well, I'll show you ! Wait until my letter reaches Constantza !'

XXIX

No answer coming to their letter, Pricop decided someone should go to Constantza without delay. Not that Adam Jora was of much account. But why should he be left to do his will on board ship? The sooner he was removed the better.

One night, a fishing smack came to the ship with cases of tins, and Spiru Vasiliu came with it. Whenever he could, the fellow hopped on a boat, feeling it was the only place where he was really alive, as the land nearly choked him.

And there, watching a case dangling from the boom in the dark air above the upper deck of the *October Star* flooded by the light of reflectors, Spiru Vasiliu felt somebody touch his arm:

"Comrade Vasiliu..."

He turned round — it was Pricop.

"Oh, hello, comrade chairman..." and they shook hands.

"Come over here, I've something to tell you..."

And having drawn him into a dark corner under the cabin deck Pricop quickly whispered to him:

"Captain, take care what you're up to with the equipment...The fishermen are wild about those hurri-

cane lamps. They say the men were drowned because of them."

"Let them go to hell!..." Spiru Vasiliu said with unconcern.

"Well, I've warned you: be careful. If you get into a hole I can't help you. So long."

And Pricop disappeared into the darkness. Spiru Vasiliu shrugged his shoulders: he was sick and tired of it — sick and tired of it all. Ah, if he could only get away to the big ports and business, and the women!

Returning with the fishing smack was also Preţiosu who, the next day, visited the secretary of the regional committee. The former miner had an open letter on his desk: it was plain he had read it and had made a point of not answering it.

"Glad to see you," he said. "But after this letter of yours I really don't know what to think..."

"Comrade secretary," Preţiosu said, "if that instructor remains on board, I won't answer for the work of the organization. What exactly did he come for? To help or hinder us?"

"Keep to the point," the secretary said. "And tell me what's happened?"

Preţiosu told him the story of the fishing-boats.

"All on his own!" he repeated indignantly. "He had hardly set foot on board before he began deciding what should be done, without coming into contact with the organization bureau, without discussing the matter with anyone. What kind of a man is that? And to tell you the truth, he's more with the fishermen at sea than assisting us on board. He wastes his time, comrade secretary, and also creates a bad atmosphere. The men no longer trust the organization bureau, they look askance at us..."

"But how's that?" the other asked. "What's the reason for it all? And what's he done to make the men behave like that?"

But even as he spoke, his mind went to Nicolau and the boatswain and the things they had told him. Maybe this Preţiosu himself was not all that he should be..."

"They form a clique, comrade secretary, together with two or three Party members, and criticize the organization bureau."

"And who are those Party members?" the secretary asked.

"Comrade Nicolau, the boatswain..."

The secretary looked at him thoughtfully. Was the organization bureau taking the right way and were the others simply dissatisfied elements? It was difficult to know the truth and so easy to make a mistake...And when one made a mistake the consequences were very serious...

"Comrade !" Preţiosu said suddenly like a man overcome with indignation. "He doesn't know how to work ! He makes great mistakes. I was wondering whether it was right to tell you what he's done..."

"But what did he do?"the other asked unpleasantly surprised and raising his eyebrows.

"We had an accident...You know the case."

"Yes, I heard about it," the secretary murmured.

"Well, what can we do? Such are our difficulties. Socialism isn't built in a day," Preţiosu said. "We haven't got all all the equipment we need. There aren't enough hurricane lamps. Too small a number are produced and an insufficient amount has been allocated to our trust, or there may be another reason. In any case we haven't got enough lamps. And the fishermen say that's the reason why the men were drowned. It may

be that, it may be something else. But Comrade Jora, instead of explaining our difficulties to the men, trying to make things clear to them, stirs them up against us, the organization bureau and the trade union!"

"What d'ye mean, stirs them?"the other asked with a frown.

"Well...he doesn't stand by us! He takes the fishermen's part!"

"But do you and the fishermen have differences of opinion?" the secretary asked with displeasure.

"No," Preţiosu laughed a humble, forced laugh. "No, oh, no! But he doesn't make things clear to those it should be made clear to..."

The secretary was silent. Preţiosu saw that he was thinking. He tried another way of approach:

"And to tell you the truth, I think this comrade is biassed. He's got something against Pricop Danilov. They come from the same village and had a quarrel in their youth. That's why I think he's no good to us; maybe he'd be all right elsewhere, but here, where he has old friends and enemies, he's no good. It's not as it should be, comrade secretary, that he should work with us..."

Pricop Danilov was a good teacher. He had inherited his father's unsparing cunning. The second secretary was silent for a moment and then he said:

"All right... I'll talk the matter over with the others and see what there is to be done."

Two days after Preţiosu had returned on board ship a radiogram summoned Adam Jora back to Constantza. The second secretary greeted him rather coldly and asked him sharply:

"Look here, Comrade Jora, why didn't you tell me there was a personal matter between you and Comrade Danilov?"

"Which of the two Danilovs?" Adam asked.

It was like a blow below the belt. His work at sea was in danger. The men on board, the fishermen, everything was in danger. Where had this come from? From Pricop and Preţiosu? And why? Were they afraid of him? Had they anything to conceal?

"With Pricop Danilov," the secretary said. It was only now that he learned that there were two Danilovs.

"There was never anything between me and Pricop. But I had a fight once with his brother Simion when we were both young..." Adam said with a pale smile.

"What over?"

"A girl..." Adam said. And then he asked himself: 'Why should I conceal it from him? He should know about it.' "I wanted to marry a girl but I was sent to prison and then he married her," Adam said looking the secretary straight in the face. The latter had brightened up.

"And where are they now?"

"He's a fisherman and she's down in the village."

"Have you seen her since?"

Adam swallowed hard and said in disgust:

"I saw her in '44. Never since."

"So you've got nothing against Pricop Danilov?"

"Nothing. I fished for his father, a kulak down in our village..." And again he looked at the second secretary.

The latter was thinking: 'I know him. And he's the same as I have always known him...'

He said gently:

"Look here, Jora, the Party knows Danilov's origin, but his activity in the last few years has made us overlook it. He has broken away from his class and has no connection with his people... And then you must consider

the work of the bureau, and not remember the enmities between you in the past. You've got nothing personal against Preţiosu."

"Nothing; neither against him nor against Pricop Danilov," Adam exclaimed.

"And don't have," the other went on in the same gentle tone, so as not to stir up Adam's old hatred. "Preţiosu is a seaman, the son of a docker, and we know him for an honest man. You must support him."

And he told him about the mistakes he'd made.

"I worked on my own, that's true. Quick action was needed," Adam said, "but if I'd considered things more carefully, there'd have been time to speak with the organization bureau. As to cliquing together... and creating the wrong atmosphere...they do that themselves. They work inefficiently, separate the organization from the masses, from the technical cadres and the whole ship trembles with fear of 'em... But why go on with it: I shall draw up a report when I've done..."

The secretary looked at him doubtfully. 'He's the same as I've always known him. And yet... if there's that old hatred between them? He's admitted he made mistakes, so Preţiosu was at least partly right.'

"Listen here, Jora. It isn't so easy to deal with people. Even though you've nothing against Danilov, maybe he thinks you have, or others think it, and it is not good that such a thought should be harboured about one of our instructors..."

"Comrade, let me go on working with this organization," Jora pleaded. "Another'ud need a year to understand the work there. Unless he's a fisherman like me, and from the same village as many of 'em. And things are not as they should be there... There's something

rotten at the core. Let me carry on with my work and I'll put things right!"

"Well, we'll see. I'll talk things over with the comrades in the bureau. For the present you'll remain here — not return to the ship!"

Adam's countenance changed.

"It's a pity for every day lost," he said. "Production's in a very bad way there; there's anarchy on that ship. There's no safety equipment. Men have even been drowned because there were no hurricane lamps. I hoped to come to you after a few weeks and tell you that the output had been doubled; that the Party organization was a model one; and that the men were satisfied with their conditions."

He looked bitterly disappointed; he regarded the other pleadingly but the former miner became more obdurate:

"One moment," he said. "Why this hurry? It's better to work safely... to know that we're doing the right thing. I'll call you if we decide to send you back."

That same evening the regional bureau severely criticized the director of the fleet for the lack of hurricane lamps on the fishing-boats. This annoyed the director, so he summoned Spiru Vasiliu and had half an hour's angry talk with him, keeping him standing throughout the interview. Back in his bureau Spiru Vasiliu drew up an order for hurricane lamps, but being in a hurry to meet Angelica he forgot to post the letter. A few days later, on being asked by the director as to whether he had sent the order, Spiru Vasiliu, unbalanced by his passion for Angelica, and, moreover, sick and tired of his office, answered with a show of self-assurance that he had sent the letter and was awaiting the answer.

The fishing fleet arrived in Constantza at the end of the month and left for the open sea again, leaving Adam Jora behind.

XXX

The fishermen had returned to the villages and towns along the shore — Constantza, Mangalia, Sf. Gheorghe, Danilofca and Sulina. For five days they had stayed at home with their wives and children and now had gone to sea again. The weather was fine, the sky overhead clear, with only thin wisps of cloud very high up, and the dry barren fields of Dobruja had grown green with the young grass that was unaware that the sun would soon parch it, the dust choke it and the drought kill it right off. It was unaware of all this, as were the flowers growing amongst it, and gently swayed its tender green blades in the wind. In the Danube backwaters the cuckoo sang in the willows, the water-lilies floated in their immaculate white, and the rushes swayed their huge velvety golden tassels like tall imperial sceptres. The fishermen's children paddled in the cold sea as they went to play under the boats pulled up on the beaches, and the older ones learnt to mend the fishing-nets. On moonlit nights millions of silver-bellied fish teemed in the water at Gura Portiţei. They leapt up in the air, getting caught in the wicker fences, and the fishermen scooped them out with huge ladles and threw them back into the sea, working all night over the cold water that teemed with fish and sparkled in the cold moonlight.

From among the fishermen of Danilofca, Emelian Romanov and others who had been only in their teens

twelve years ago when the big storm had raged, and the story about Adam Jora had cropped up, told their wives and friends that Adam Jora had returned to sea. But he was no longer a fisherman — he had taken on another job. Still he had returned to sea-life. And it had certainly been proved that he had been sentenced and imprisoned an innocent man, as many had suspected from the very beginning, and as the rumour ran and was confirmed along the years until no one doubted it any more. Nor could it be doubted that the Danilovs — father and sons — had done the mischief, as the reason was seen later when Simion Danilov married Uliana, who, as some of the girls knew, had promised herself to Adam.

One of Uliana's friends who had first grieved with her, who had later taken her to the dance and merry-making, had even advised her to marry Simion ("What a fool you are!" they had said. "Your youth'll soon be over and then not even the devil — God defend us from him — will look at you.") and had attended her wedding — one of these girls had married Emelian Romanov and had five children by him. She was one of the few friends Uliana had left. When Emelian came back from his first voyage of the fleet that year, he told her the very same night about Adam Jora, and how changed he was, but how he, Emelian, had recognized him. And he told her what they had talked about, and many other things.

The next evening his wife put on a new yellow kerchief with red flowers, arranged her blouse neatly and went down the village street, her arms folded across her breast. She went straight to Uliana's where she found Simion at his meal, with Uliana waiting on him. Simion greeted her sullenly. The old people sat in silence. Emelian Romanov's wife began:

"Fine weather we are having this year, aren't we? If there'd only be a drop of rain we'd have such a crop as we haven't had for long."

"Ye-es," Simion said.

The old people still kept silent, and Uliana too.

"And I think the grapes will grow well too. So the fishermen'll have plenty to drink when they return from sea," Romanov's wife went on gaily.

"How d'you know whether the wine'll be good?" Simion asked contemptuously.

The woman answered serenely:

"Well, I think it will be..."

Simion muttered something in reply and shrugged his shoulders. Romanov's wife now glanced at Uliana for the first time and said:

"How pretty you're looking, Uliana, and how strong! You bloom in the spring, like the grass in the fields!"

Uliana gave a cold smile but said nothing. Simion, however, looked at her and narrowed his eyes while a faint gleam lit up his eyes. He was thinking: 'I'll have you in my arms again, my lady, and do as I like with you...' for Uliana still stirred him and he desired her.

"Well," Emelian's wife said, "I suppose I must go back to my folks at home. I only popped in to see how you were... Come, Uliana, take me to the gate for I'm afraid of the dogs."

And out she went, her hands crossed upon her bosom — a strong sturdy woman who wouldn't have feared a pack of wolves, certainly not a couple of dogs, and one of them a pup. When they reached the gate she took Uliana by the hand, drew her towards her and whispered to her hurriedly:

"Adam's come back... He's with the fishermen at sea — working for the Party now, I don't know exactly

at what. But he's out at sea with our men and when he's not with them he's at the Party headquarters in town. He's just as he was in the old days, only sadder. Good night now. I'll come again and tell you what I hear."

And she was off. Uliana remained motionless in the dark, she didn't know how long. Then she looked up at the sky and about her. There was a starry blue sky and silence all around, broken only by the barking of the village dogs. A clear, biting wind was blowing — a cold spring wind. Uliana breathed of it deeply before going in.

"What did she have to talk about so long?" Simion asked suspiciously.

Uliana answered kindly:

"She didn't keep me talking; she left some time ago. But I stopped outside for a bit."

Simion looked at her, astonished at her way of speaking. Usually Uliana spoke to him as to a stranger, as if addressing him from a distance; and he rejoiced. 'She's been tamed,' he thought, 'and it's better so.'

Late at night when the old people had gone to sleep and were snoring lustily, Simion drew her towards him panting. Uliana, who had been lying motionless against the wall hardly breathing, pushed him away savagely.

"Leave me alone," she said coldly and meaningly.

"Why?" Simion asked. "What's the matter now? What's come over you?"

"Just leave me alone," Uliana said. "I've had enough of you, you make me sick."

Bitter anger seized Simion — anger different from his usual temper; an anger in which there was humiliation and degradation, which took his strength from him as with a hand, leaving him weak and helpless — a wash-out.

"You're thinking of him," he said furiously in the dark.

"I am," Uliana said under her breath.

"Did that woman tell you anything?"

Uliana did not answer.

"Let her come to my house again to spoil my wife and I'll knock her head off, the blasted bitch ! I'll knock her head off !"

"If I hadn't heard about him today I'd have heard another time," Uliana said quietly.

"Today or later, you're my wife at present," he said between his teeth and tried to force her to his will.

Uliana, however, was strong and struggled fiercely, resisted until he felt sick of love-making, of her, of himself, and, angry and exhausted, gave it up in humiliation, got out of bed, took a blanket and went to sleep in the hay in the manger.

From that night on they kept apart. Simion soon went out to sea again. On his return for five days he was less at home than in town where he got drunk, spending all his money. Then he went to sea again, came back and returned anew.

In the meantime Uliana grew thinner and thinner, ailing like a sick cat. Her eyes were extraordinarily brilliant — though with the brilliance of fever. She had learnt from Emelian Romanov's wife everything that she could about Adam, after which she suddenly refused to speak about him. And then one day, when Simion had left for a neighbouring village to see some relations about getting a job as a worker, so as not to go to sea again, Uliana said to the old people that she would go to town.

"Where to?" Simion's mother had asked.

"To the doctor's," Uliana answered staring at the wall in front of her.

"What, are you ill?" the old woman asked.

"Yes, I'm ill," Uliana said. "Very ill!" she added suddenly, and was silent after that, as if afraid of what she had said.

"Yes, ill with whoring!" the old woman shouted, adding many other insults and curses.

And old Eftei Danilov roared:

"You're not going to leave here until Simion returns!"

"Why?" Uliana asked.

"Because he's your husband before God and you must obey him!" Eftei Danilov said.

"Before the demons down in hell perhaps," Uliana shouted passionately. "And I won't stay here to let you kill me. I'll rather kill you both!"

There was so much determination and impetuous fearlessness in this outburst that the old people were left speechless, looking after her as she went out of the gate.

And Eftei Danilov said when he had found his voice:

"There's no shame in them any more... No faith... No law... nothing... It's the end of the world... The end of the world..." And looking up at the sky — a blue spring sky with transparent clouds unimaginably high up — he asked:

"How long will You endure it, oh, God? How long?"

XXXI

The next afternoon Adam Jora stood in the building of the regional committee arranging files on the corner of a table. He was alone in the room. People were

speaking and walking about in the next room on the other side of the glass door; a voice could he heard shouting angrily into the telephone:

"Don't interrupt, Comrade! We're speaking! Yes, yes, we are speaking!"

The door opened and a young man thrust in his head, darting his keen, inquiring eyes about frowning.

"Comrade Jora, there's someone for you."

"Who is it?" Adam asked over his shoulder, not taking his eyes from the file on the table; then, hearing only the closing of the door, he straightened himself suddenly and turned round.

Uliana had entered the room, gently pushing the big-eyed lad aside, had closed the door behind her and now stood there in silence. She was still young but her fresh face had become sunburnt and roughened by working in the fields. Her eyebrows were still arched and well shaped and her grey eyes extremely bright. She looked at him now with those grey eyes under the shadow of her long black lashes. Her mouth, at one time full and moist, had become dry and tight-lipped like that of a sad, determined woman. And yet there was a smile of defiance in her bright eyes. So she stood, tall and straight, with shoulders like those of a sixteen-year-old lad, with rounded hips and slender, graceful waist. Her hands were folded — she had fine big hands but they were beginning to show signs of age and work before their time — and she waited with that daring and defiant smile in her eyes. She did not speak. Adam Jora had turned white. For a few moments neither moved.

"What have you come for?" Adam asked hoarsely.

He took her all in. He could see the thin creases around her eyes and those at the corner of her lips. There was no longer that flower-like glamour on her face.

A tall peasant woman who had worked too much and would soon be quite faded. A tall peasant woman, a fisherman's wife. A pain shot through his breast, as if a hand with sharp nails were plucking at his flesh, pinching it, digging its fingers into it. The pain was at his heart. And the ache he was suffering — heart-ache.

"I came to see you," Uliana said flushing slightly. "I... I had to see some relations here and... I came to see you and ask you how you are," she concluded with a weak, uncertain laugh.

Adam spoke gruffly in a low voice:

"Well, now you've seen me, you can go."

And he added under his breath:

"Go."

Uliana's lips began to quiver at the corners, and her eyes to fill with tears. She murmured:

"Forgive me, I came to ask you... to forgive me."

Adam gave a short laugh — a bitter laugh in angry pain.

"It's easy to say 'forgive.' But can you make up to me for all those nights on the bare boards in the mine when I couldn't sleep for love of you? Then..."

He wanted to add: 'and since,' but he bit his lips and was silent.

"No, I shall never forgive you for taking your pleasure with Simion while I lay raving for you in the mine! It should have made you sick with shame!"

He spat on the floor and a shiver passed through him. Uliana bit her lips. She would have liked to say something but he gave her no chance:

"Did you never feel ashamed? You want me to forgive you? But did you pity me and my heart-ache? Why didn't you spare me that suffering? And you come to ask me for 'forgiveness' now..."

He stopped talking. He was breathing hard. Then he pointed towards the door, saying:

"You'd better go."

Uliana hesitated. Then suddenly, looking straight at him, she laughed defiantly like a she-devil:

"If you wish me to..."

And turning round, with her graceful hips swaying, she went out. Shortly after, the gate-keeper was surprised to see a woman come down the steps and all at once burst into tears as she passed into the street. Adam who had remained motionless for a time turned on his heels and, without full consciousness, crossed to the window and looked out. And looking out thus upon the street apathetically, he saw Uliana. She was walking very slowly, as if she had lost her strength, with hanging head and dangling arms that seemed to have become limp and weak. She was tall, but too thin and weak. She was walking between two lines of country carts without observing where she was going, seeing and hearing nothing, and once or twice was very nearly knocked down by an axle of a cart or the horses. Adam heard a man in a cart shout angrily at her, then turn round towards another fellow near him and laugh. The carts went on and Uliana continued her slow pace along the fence on the other side of the street. Adam rushed out into the street and, catching up with her, took her by the shoulders and started leading her back. As he lent over her he asked:

"Why did you come? Did you come for them?"

She did not understand. She stood looking at him with eyes full of tears and trembling lips which were again fresh and full, as in the old days.

"For the sake of Pricop and the others? For the sake of Simion?" Adam asked hoarsely.

She smiled between her tears as a child would have smiled, resting her head on his shoulder in weak denial. He looked at her pityingly for a moment, then burst out, though he tried to control his voice:

"You're crying now but why didn't you think before of your life and mine? Why didn't you think what would become of me? I've only got one life and one heart. And a broken heart's the end of life. What have you done with my life? With my heart? My youth's passed. But I'd still be young if my heart wasn't dead. If I could once again know the feeling of joy. You never thought of that, did you? You never thought you'd break my heart. And how are you to mend it now? How are you to give me back my youth? If you had the whole world to help, you couldn't repair what's been destroyed. You see a young tree and chop it down. Good for firewood, miserable little tree, you say. And then when there's nothing left but its stump, you come and cry over it: 'Poor little tree, forgive me. Grow green again and yield sweet apples!' Bah! it was easy for you to go with Simion and..."

He again spat in disgust on the asphalt.

"It was not easy, Adam, and I paid dearly for it. Oh! my love, I can't stand it any more, I can't, I can't," Uliana sobbed flinging her arms about his neck and letting her head fall on his chest.

The passers-by were turning in surprise to look at them. Adam took her arms away from his neck and pushed her away though without roughness. He said no more. He merely left her there and made his way back through the row of carts which went creaking along the street, slowly, unhurriedly. The man at the gate looked at Adam questioningly but Adam did not even see him. As he climbed the stairs he realized how

thin Uliana had become, and heart-rending pity took possession of him. Like an under-fed foal — he thought — with the ribs showing through its skin, and unsteady legs, and eyes too big and staring. A vague, troubled desire to go after her and bring her back, protect her, feed her, and look after her, came over him. Pity for her nearly choked him. Reaching the top of the steps he passed between the people there unconsciously and went to lock himself in the room where Uliana had found him. But another man was there now, the second Party secretary who stood looking out of the window, his hands behind his back. Adam sat down at the table and closed the file.

The secretary asked unconcernedly:

"Was that a relation of yours?"

Adam knew what that meant. 'Comrade Jora,' those words really meant, 'is it fitting that you should embrace a woman in full daylight for everyone to see even though she may be a sister or some other relation?' Adam mumbled something vague.

The other looked at him as he sat resting his elbows on his knees, and his forehead on his closed fists, then went out noiselessly, leaving Adam suddenly to remember her as she had spoken to him with her enticing laugh showing her white teeth, her grey eyes looking at him from under her lashes. "If you wish me to," she had said. And then all his strength left him. And a still more terrible pity and despair seized him. He would have gone after her again but how could he know where she had gone... He would have liked to seek her at Danilofca the next day, but the next day he had to return to sea.

At night, in his bed in the dormitory of the Party committee's hostel, housing five people, he lay with

eyes wide open in the dark, whispering words of love which he would have felt ashamed even to think of in the past.

Next to him, a militant who had returned late at night from the countryside was sleeping a heavy sleep and snoring. Long after midnight another two came from a meeting, undressing and speaking in gruff whispers, until, sighing with fatigue, they were soon in bed and asleep. But Adam lay, his hands behind his head, his lips moving noiselessly in the dark, speaking to Uliana.

When Adam had left her on the pavement, Uliana had gone slowly on her way. Later she had taken the bus that rattled its old carcass along the road, skirting the shore towards Danilofca, and sat pale and silent, her eyes fastened on the sea. Around her people talked and laughed; a few ducks quacked in their wooden cases and left their dirt to ooze upon the floor, while the bus rode over the uneven ground, rattling the windows as if wanting to break the lot of them. But Uliana neither heard nor felt anything. Reaching the village she got out of the bus and went home along the dark streets, for night had fallen. The old people were sitting on a bench under the vine that climbed the wall. It was the same bench upon which Eftei and Pricop had sat and talked at night in the old days. Eftei Danilov threw a dark glance at her, while the old woman, Uliana's mother-in-law, snapped out in the dark:

"Did you get it off your chest? Did you go to the doctor's? She goes to town when her husband's away! We know what her mind runs on!"

Uliana did not answer. She felt weary — she felt weak, dirty and especially hopeless. And giddy too. 'I've got only one life, I've got only one heart!' Adam's

voice kept saying to her. She went about the house without putting on the light. "Only one life, only one heart," Uliana murmured to herself as she sat on the bed. Suddenly, however, she jumped up, remembering what Adam had said about that bed. Despair and shame seized her, then — feelings which she had to get rid of, to get rid of by any means and without delay, though how she didn't know, for she could expect nothing from life.

She went out of the house noiselessly. It was a moonlit, though misty night. A faint white mist sailed between the trees and through it the quiet waters were sparkling. Uliana went to the stables. It was warm and dark inside and there was a smell of hay, cattle and warm dung. The breathing of the cow could be heard — Eftei had sold all his other cows in the last few years, keeping but one — and the sound of munching, of chewing the cud. Uliana was cold, frozen, living as in a world apart. She groped her way along the wall and found the rope she sought. She began to tie the end of the rope in the dark — even with her mind in its present state, and in the dark she knew how to tie a knot: she was a fisherman's daughter. She made a good, tight noose and tried it to see if it slipped, whether it didn't come undone. She pulled at it with both hands, biting her lips nervously. Yes, it would be all right. She came out of the stables with the rope in her hand and looked for a thick nail in one of the house rafters. She climbed on to the bench where the old people had sat and tied the end of the rope, then put her head through the noose. 'I've got only one life,' Adam had said. 'I've got only one heart. Now that it's broken I've no other... How d'you think you can mend a heart?' He had pushed her from him, though not roughly.

Alone and pale, Uliana stood on that bench, the noose about her neck. There was great silence. Her eyes were fastened on the silvery mist floating over the waters and she was unaware of everything else. Then slowly, as if in sleep, she took her neck from the noose, letting the rope slip, and remained standing for a while. Then she sat on the bench, her elbows on her knees and her hands folded. She would wait for him.

She was ashamed. She felt small and sullied and powerless. She would wait, without any hope, like a fool. Indeed, she was a fool. What would happen to her from now on? What kind of a life was in store for her? She'd have done better to do away with herself. She couldn't though. She had to wait.

Simion was drunk when he came back home. His relatives had told him they would find a place for him on the state farm in the village where he would have to tend the cattle. He would earn less than as an open sea fisherman of a front-rank brigade, though. "I don't care about the money!" Simion had cried with a thought to his father's gold. His relations knew Simion and his folk. They understood that if he didn't care for money it meant that he had some he could fall back upon. That is why they gave him a kind welcome and too much to drink. Back home he could hardly unharness the horses. He passed the old people and threw himself on the bed, falling asleep immediately. Uliana had kept out of his way; she spent the night sitting on a stool, where she fell asleep, her arms on her knees and her head on her arms. In the morning she began to see to the house work. She knew that the old people would report on her to Simion and was waiting.

Simion came out of the house, sat down on the threshold and began to smoke. He looked at her searchingly. His gaze seemed to bore into her. Uliana felt his gaze upon her and would have liked to hide herself, not to be seen by Simion. She took a couple of pails and went to fill them. Simion was still on the threshold. As he watched Uliana go through the gate, his brow cleared and he suddenly began to laugh — a wicked, unfriendly laugh.

Uliana returned with her pails full. Simion looked straight in her face, shamelessly. As she came up to him, he did not draw aside to let her pass into the house, but looked her up and down and asked her:

"So you went to the doctor's, did you?"

Uliana did not answer. She stood in front of him, with the pails.

"Did he give you an injection?" Simion laughed.

Uliana flushed and suddenly great despair seized her; she felt her eyes filling with tears and running down her cheeks. She would have liked to stop them but couldn't.

"So it didn't work," Simion said, looking at her pitilessly. "Your going was no good."

Then he got to his feet and, facing her, snapped a direct question at her:

"Did he send you back?"

Uliana did not answer. Tears were running down her face. She hung her head while fresh tears sprang from under her lashes.

"Or did you come to an understanding?" Simion asked. It was plain that they had not come to an understanding: Uliana's tears and her silence made that clear. Simion, turning to enter the house, spoke again to Uliana. Over his shoulder, he said:

"Get out of here! I don't need a tart in my house, d'you hear? Get out!"

And he went into the house. Uliana followed him with the pails which she placed on the floor. Simion had sat down on the bed.

"Get out of here, quick," he said between his teeth. "Don't stay a minute longer — or I'll knock your head off! Get out, you whore!"

Uliana put her things together and with them made into a bundle went out into the yard. She turned to look at the house. The old people came out on the threshold and so did Simion, white as a sheet with hatred. Uliana kept silent.

"May your fortune be as dark as your heart," the old woman mumbled venomously, jeeringly.

And Eftei Danilov said:

"God'll punish you, you sinner!"

He stood looking at her from under his white eyebrows, with arms crossed and his chin on his chest — like God. Uliana turned round and somehow got out of the yard. The old people went back into the house while Simion sat in the yard, on the log they used for chopping wood on, his head between his hands. He was sorry to have driven Uliana away. 'She'll return,' he told himself, 'she'll return, for she's no place to go to. I've but to call her back and she'll return. Nobody'll try to keep her!'

Indeed her brothers and sisters did not keep her, but Emelian Romanov's wife greeted her like a sister. Simion did not go to call her back. 'I'll wait for her to come — I'll wait a month. If she doesn't come by then, I'll go and fetch her.' Pricop came to see him, they had a long talk, then both went out to sea again.

XXXII

That was the time when Mr. Zarifu became so confident and so hopeful as he had never felt he could ever become; he was growing ever richer. So he was thinking as he walked along a narrow street by the old, tumble-down mosque. The pale grey, nearly silvery walls, the wormwood with its bitter fragrance and the tufts of bristling thorns growing between the stones, the white minarets, the paneless windows — all created an atmosphere of desolation and inefficacy in the middle of Constantza.

It was along these walls that reflected gentle sorrow that Mr. Zarifu was now passing: a small, shrivelled-up figure with clothes too big across his chest that stood out like that of a thin chicken's. His big, bald head, with its small, wizened face was hanging in meditation, and, with shoulders bent and his hands behind his back, Mr. Zarifu went slowly past the ruined mosque through whose windows the blue sea and the empty pale sky could be seen. Mr. Zarifu walked slowly thinking of the great strokes of business he might arrange sending grain and timber to the Levant.

From high up above the " Sea Glamour" restaurant, he would look for hours at the ships in the port and return home as if intoxicated.

Sitting in a wicker armchair and reading an old detective story of the 15-lei series, all soiled and dog-eared, Angelica saw her father with the twinkle of merriment in his eyes, and though there was weariness in the look she returned him, there was hardly any surprise.

"Angelica ! My child !" Zarifu said stroking her head with trembling hands. "If you knew what a future is in store for you ! How rich father's darling will be !"

He laughed, and sang a foolish song invented by himself in the dazed state he was in. Then, folding the plump, sturdy Angelica to his breast — the breast that looked like a weak old chicken's — he went on: "I'll build up a great fortune for you, only for you ! Don't tell Spiru though, d'you hear? He's a lady-killer, a male, and he mustn't know... This must be a secret between father and his little girl. You'll come into such a fortune as to have no need to depend upon him." So did Mr. Zarifu speak as he walked about the house by himself, chuckling like a merry old man, and taking two or three steps in a joyful dance.

In those days began Mr. Zarifu's great joyousness. He joked, grew young again, patted his younger colleagues on their shoulders and threatened to fight them. He was changed beyond recognition. The others laughed and joked with him:

"Uncle Tasuli, how is it to be young?"

"Oh, it's good! it's good," the manager, director, and owner-to-be of the Import-Export Company, of the Shipping Line, and Shipping and Transport Agency, chuckled. These fools, the petty clerks at Constantza, did not know that his shabby clothes and black sateen oversleeves concealed the great Athanasios Zarifu.

But in the evening Angelica slipped out of the house to meet a young man at the Venetian lighthouse. The young man's hair was brushed smoothly from his temples, but formed a curly twist over his forehead, and he wore unusually narrow trousers. He smoked and walked with swaying shoulders as if from each of them hung a hundred pounds, although really they were angular and bony.

"Did you wait long?" Angelica asked with a provocative smile looking at him from under her lashes.

The young man who was hardly out of his teens answered:

"Of course not! I've only just come...But if you come late on purpose, see if you don't get your block punched! I've no time to wait for little girls, I'm busy."

"Rot!" Angelica cooed. "You busy? Opening 'a smoke factory maybe?"

"Oho, if only I had a bit of brass, you'd see... I'd get a lorry, a good one. You don't know, silly little chump that you are, what a lorry can bring in these days? Why, lorry drivers can hardly walk for the cash in their pockets."

"But the trouble is you have no brass," Angelica murmured pressing tight the thin, bony, sinewy arm of the young man.

The latter sighed:

"I'll get some, though... I'll break into a state food-store when they have a pile there."

"And if you had some, would you take me with you to Bucharest?" Angelica asked, giving him a long look.

"I would," the young man said with an air of superiority; he was sure he would never have any money. "I'd take you all right. I'd get you rigged out at the Romarta luxury shop and take you to the big restaurants and the cinema... What a time we'd have..." the young man sighed.

Angelica was silent. After a while she asked him:

"And how much would you need?"

"Oh, a thousand, perhaps, to get us to Bucharest and, once there, I have my tricks."

Angelica did not mention the matter any more, but she was thinking hard.

Where could she get a thousand lei? What could she sell? Nothing in the house that she might raise a thousand lei on occurred to her for the moment.

XXXIII

The first secretary of the regional committee had been a sailor who had seen many things and many people, was heavy-browed, with a big nose and thick lips and with intelligent hazel eyes that now examined Adam Jora. The second secretary, a former miner, was sitting in an armchair in front of the desk and also had his eyes on Adam, whose face after a sleepless night was drawn and gloomy-looking.

"Why are you so thin, man?" the first secretary asked him.

Adam shrugged his shoulders and answered in a constrained voice:

"Well, what can I say to that?..."

The second secretary laughed:

"He misses the sea and would like to return to it..."

"Look here, Comrade Jora. We've talked your problem over and have reached the conclusion that it would be better if we let you go on with your work on the *October Star*..."

Adam's face brightened and his heart thumped. But he added quickly:

"And with the fishing fleet, comrade secretary?"

The second secretary laughed:

"Look at him, you give him an inch and he takes an ell!"

The first secretary looked at Adam inquiringly:

"Why with the fleet too?"

"They can't be considered apart from one another, comrade secretary," Adam said, and began to explain how the two were one and the same thing. The two men listened patiently to him, then the first secretary went on:

"That problem is rather your responsibility, Comrade Jora. You realize what confidence the Party has put in you. Comrade..." and he gave the name of the second secretary, "...told me how keen you were on your job and we're glad to find a man who takes his work to heart—that means he does it well. He told me you'd promised to give good results. And that's all we require. But think of your responsibility! If ever you make a mistake there'll be people who'll say: 'See, we informed the Party committee and yet they kept this man on at his job against our wish.' You understand? Your mistake is ours as well. And now go, and good work!"

He held out his hand. The second secretary left the room with Adam to whom he said in the corridor:

"And don't let us hear about any personal matters again."

Adam stopped short and turned towards him:

"Not even if Pricop Danilov should prove worthless to the cause?"

"Oh, don't talk nonsense," the former miner mumbled. "Do your work as the Party has taught you and don't bring personal matters in, whether in hate or friendship. That's all I have to tell you."

"I'll do as you say," Adam said, thinking: 'Can you doubt it?' Otherwise he would have been ashamed to have said "I'll do as you say." There could be no doubt about it.

✦

On board the ship he felt that Nicolau, Marinică, Prodan, the captain, and many others were glad to see him back. Neither did Preţiosu and Pricop give him a cold welcome. Pricop even drew him aside one stifling afternoon, when there was no movement on the upper deck, save the continuous clicking of the hermetic tin-closing machines down in the factory. He took him to a shady spot, and, after they had both sat down on a bitt, began thus:

"I should like to tell you something, Adam," he said. "Just listen a moment. It's silly calling each other Comrade. We've known each other since we were kids, haven't we?"

"Yes," Adam said. "Since we were nippers."

He didn't like this open, seemingly friendly manner Pricop had adopted. He did not believe in it; nor did he conceal his distrust and coldness. 'We've known each other since we were nippers. So we have!'

"Well, let's forget the past. Don't look upon me as the son of old Danilov. I've done with him. It's all over. Ever since you came here you've looked askance at me. But I've done you no harm. D'you think I don't want you to help us? Help us all you can, brother. We've got our shortcomings too, we're not God Almigthy! Only those who don't work make no mistakes."

"Well, you don't work too much and yet you make mistakes," Adam replied giving a dry, mirthless laugh.

"There you are again... you see the kind of man you are? I try to come to an understanding with you, and look how you take it."

"I don't want to come to any understanding," Adam said rising to his feet. "I want Party work here to go well, and that's all."

He turned his back on him and went away.

After this talk he did not stop much longer on board ship. He spent his time mostly with the fishermen's brigades.

The seamen off duty and the women workers of the tinned-fish factory off shift, who stood with their elbows on the rails watching the approach of the cutters full of fish, would sometimes notice on one of them a barefooted man dressed in grey cotton trousers, with sunburnt chest and shoulders. This man was Adam Jora who, returning from the brigades, would sit on the upper deck of the cutter, his elbows resting on his knees, waiting for it to be fastened alongside the bigger vessel. When this was done he would pick up his rubber boots and his short, padded coat and go up the ladder. He looked so very much like the other fishermen that nobody heeded him.

Pricop Danilov alone watched him closely. He felt uneasy. At the beginning he did not realize that he feared him. He thought he didn't care and that he'd soon be rid of him. However, there had been no answer to his letter. That was the first thing that had made him nervous, had given him the sort of feeling one has when, walking along a smooth, even road, one suddenly drops into a hole. Now he no longer felt safe. Had anything happened? Had anything changed? Suddenly the road he was treading had become unsafe, as if it were quicksand full of perils. Pricop had spent many nights thinking of Adam, of what, he thought, was probably going on in Adam's heart, of what had happened ten years before, and he had taken fright. 'What possessed me then?' he had asked himself. Then he suddenly rejected the question and the faint regret he had felt. He had to remove him from here and that at the soonest, or it

would go hard with him. Adam was too silent, listened too much; was too patient; was too much on the watch, his ears pricked up all the time; he wanted too much to see them "at work." Pricop and Preţiosu had never worked in the spirit of doing real political work; they were unable to do it. And they had a vague feeling that this was what was wanted of them; that they had to be leaders, to help push things forward, to "rally" people and put some "dynamism" into them, as the phrase went. But they were incapable of leading, they only knew how to impose their masterfulness, through threats and fear, and this required other qualities than those necessary to a leader. Wasn't it likely they would be called to account? Might they not be removed from the places they occupied? — a thing which might not seem to have great importance but which, in their case, was humiliating and even dangerous, for their masterfulness relied on intimidation and brutal brazenness. Such were the thoughts that went on in Pricop's mind; and they worried him so much that after a time he could no longer keep them to himself, but spoke about them to Preţiosu. The latter gave a superior laugh: he was delighted that for once his was the leading spirit.

"Get away with you, Pricop, me lad... He's just a snivelling kid! *He* cope with me? I'll teach him to come and play the instructor here... why, man... you're talking like an old woman!"

Pricop however could not help being worried. He felt that some of the men behaved differently towards him now. Of course there were those, like Lae or the store-keeper, and another two or three who were the same as before. Nicolau, however, only gave him cold, stiff answers now; Marinică, the boatswain, had contradicted him several times, and Prodan had made it

plainer than ever that he did not agree with anything Preţiosu and Pricop were doing — all the decisions of the organization bureau being taken by the two of them above Prodan's head, and despite his opposition.

And then, one afternoon, Pricop heard something which really put him on tenterhooks. It was a hot and sunny day and the sea was calm and clear. Flights of sea-gulls swam about the boats like ducks in a pond, catching in their beaks the red, pink and brown pieces of fishes' entrails which came from the ship in the ceaseless outflow of the pumps. The air smelt of fried fish and of cod liver oil, but the atmosphere and the sea were bright and transparent, being permeated by a radiating brilliance that made it hard to distinguish between them. Seated on a bitt Pricop had been eating bread and onions by himself. After which he had lain down behind the big lifeboat which, once freshly painted and covered by a canvas, complete with oars and mast, had been installed high up to the starboard in 1902, and had not been moved for half a century. Here Pricop lay on the upper deck in the sultry atmosphere of that place, protected from the wind, with closed eyes, his head on his arms. The sun struck right on his nape, giving him a feeling of giddiness.

He hated Adam Jora. He hated him because he was stronger than himself and had always been stronger. And when he had thought he had crushed him for ever, when he had thought he had forgotten him, and that he was no longer alive, he had turned up from heaven knows where, stronger than he, and having the right to control him and judge his actions; empowered to say whether the things he, Pricop, did were right or wrong. And who was this judge? Adam Jora, formerly a barefoot depen-

dent whom he had once crushed merely by saying a few words to his old man. Adam Jora, whom they had sent to prison, whose girl they had taken, whom they had buried as far as he was concerned. It was against nature, it was unendurable; he must be got out of their way. But to achieve this a plan was needed which must be carried out step by step, the last step to be Adam's removal from the ship — Pricop did not yet know exactly how this was to come about — and, if possible, the Party's sanction or even Adam's expulsion from the Party, and, better still, imprisonment. The means to achieve this must be found. Should he push him into the arms of one of the factory girls and have him accused of an offence against her? Should he get him mixed up with Preţiosu whom he would tempt into doing some dirty trick or going in for some orgy of drunkenness, and thus have him pushed into prison again, this time together with Preţiosu?

It was hot and the sun brought his tumultuous blood rushing to his head. The sound of soft voices could be heard. He looked over the rails. Seated on planks suspended between two cables, some of the seamen were painting the iron sides of the deck. Beneath him, at a certain distance from the others, were Uncle Marinică, the boatswain, and Prodan. They had interrupted their painting. There was paint on their faces and shoulders. Prodan had a green moustache; he had wiped his nose with his hand. Just then he was unravelling the loose end of the cable from which they and their paint-spotted plank swung, twisting the strings of hemp that were as thick as his finger, and then twisting them again over one another — while Marinică looked at the white cable which was almost as thick as his arm and murmured:

"I don't think of my duty as a Party member as you do. My outlook is different, Prodan."

He was a short, dried-up fellow, nothing but bones and sinews, and his hair was grey. He looked at the cable with his calm, steel-grey eyes and continued:

"Others have told you the same. The men at the engines have told you. And so have the fishermen: Luca Gheorghe and that lad in Emelian's brigade. We trust you; but if you don't do something soon, we shall lose our confidence in you. Take hold of this cable and pull, just try it."

They both pulled with all their might: it was all right, as was only to be expected with such an old seaman as Prodan on the job. Prodan began to make a coil of the cable while the boatswain took his pipe and tobacco pouch out of his pocket and, watching him, began to smoke. Prodan had finished with the cable but had not answered. The boatswain spat into the water.

"Have you spoken with that instructor?"

Prodan mumbled:

"Listen here, comrade boatswain..."

They had been seamen together on many ships, that had sailed over many seas, and been captained by men of different nationalities. They were old friends; but Marinică was boatswain and Prodan considered that everyone should keep his place on board; apart from which Uncle Marinică was an old man, hence his calling him "comrade boatswain."

"Comrade boatswain, you're right, it's a good thing you've told me this."

"It's my duty to criticize you," the other said calmly.

"Yes. If everyone did his duty on board this ship it would be far better," Prodan murmured.

"And your duty is to take heed of what the Party branch tells you," Marinică continued.

"Yes, though it's Preţiosu's duty in the first place, even if it is also mine."

"If he doesn't do his duty, you must still do yours," Marinică continued.

He spoke slowly, pointedly, with his teeth biting into the stem of his pipe, and watching the waves with his grey eyes.

Prodan said:

"Give over, now, don't be so hard on me. I'll support the comrades who have something to say."

The boatswain drew at his pipe and looking at Prodan through the smoke, said:

"That's not enough, Prodan. We must criticize Preţiosu and Pricop. We must tell them openly what the men think."

Prodan gave a laugh as he said:

"Criticize them and criticize me as well. I've noted what the Party teaches about criticism. We shall see if the instructor has heard about it too..."

The boatswain nodded slowly and added:

"It was a great mistake electing Preţiosu and Pricop... I could chop my hand off when I think that I voted for them..."

Pricop who had heard everything, drew back his head when the boatswain moved forward. He listened for another minute or two but could no longer hear the men speak. They were going on with their painting very likely. Pricop remained where he was and thought deeply. Yes; there were several determined men in the branch. If they started criticizing, nobody could foresee how far they would go; or rather it could be foreseen. The

upshot would be the removal of Preţiosu and himself. The boatswain had spoken quite clearly. That's what he wanted. And maybe others wanted it too. And if he, Pricop, together with Preţiosu, were no longer big enough and no longer strong enough to inspire them with fear, then maybe someone would look more closely into what they had done these last few years, and might find out several unpleasant things. That would lead to Pricop and Preţiosu being dismissed from the ship, to their being struck off the list of the crew, as well as to other investigations, and then maybe Pricop's past would be exposed — certain things that had happened in Istambul and Malta and... Yes, in any case all this had to be put an end to from the start. He must shut their mouths, attach some blame to them so that Adam Jora should get no support from them, so that the Party shouldn't listen to them, consider them as people not deserving of confidence.

He thought of nothing else the whole day. Then he had a talk with Preţiosu. He told him what he had heard as he lay behind the lifeboat and pointed out to him that "such a trend should be combated, Sile, my good man; whispering in corners is not healthy, and the Party has sent us here, Comrade, so as not to allow cliques and fractions to form within the organization. Do you get me?"

Despite his stupidity Preţiosu understood when there was danger in the offing. He understood that the label of "clique" and "fraction," attached to those who did not agree with them, meant that the battle was half won: the Communists could not stand any tampering with the unity of their organization. So he listened carefully and made a note of everything Pricop told him.

Pricop waited for a day when Adam had left the ship and sent word that Simion Danilov's brigade should be summoned as soon as they came with their haul. Simion came back some time towards noon. Pricop sought him out and said:

"Listen here, Simion: tonight there's going to be a meeting which Comrade Jora must attend."

He was not looking at Simion. The latter stood barefoot, bespattered with fish blood and salt water, looking at him with a frown that betokened suspicion. When he heard Pricop mention Comrade Jora, he frowned still harder and said defiantly:

"What's this, now? Are you afraid of him?"

Pricop was in dead earnest when he said:

"You listen to what I tell you. And take heed. He must be here tonight without fail. You're going to leave right now. You go over to where Luca Gheorghe's brigade is fishing and tell Comrade Jora that he must attend the meeting without fail."

There was a strange expression on Simion's face as he looked at his brother. The puckering on his forehead began to relax. He asked:

"And if I forget to tell him?"

"It would be a bad thing then," Pricop said solemnly.

"Bad for who? For him or for us?" Simion asked slowly, his face brightening and looking at Pricop with his pale blue, nearly white eyes in his unshaven and sunburnt face. "Bad for him or for us?" Simion repeated.

Pricop gave a sudden laugh and looked at him squarely though without answering. Then he said:

"See that you don't forget to tell him."

"Leave it to me," Simion said and laughed as he touched the peak of his cap in salute.

XXXIV

In the evening the meeting began and Adam had not arrived. The sea was almost still now, the sky was packed with clouds and somewhere far away a red flash of lightning streaked the heavens — no sound following. An hour passed and then another. From various corners of the darkness mute lightning flashes lit up the round port-holes of the dining-room under the poop deck. A big bulb covered with flies hung from the ceiling. The members of the Party branch were seated on five or six long benches. In front of them at a table covered with thin, red paper sat Preţiosu with Pricop on his right and Prodan on his left. Everybody was tired with the all-prevailing sultriness and the stifling air. They opened the port-holes but no fresh breeze came in. The only sound was the lapping of the waves against the ship; now and then a blue or red light shone through all the port-holes for a moment, then they became dark again, and again you could hear the sleepy motion of the waves in the silence of the night.

Preţiosu was not pleased. He had slept badly, having got drunk on his own in his cabin when he had come off watch. His head felt heavy, he was nervous and cantankerous as always after a bout of drinking. He had become angry even before the meeting had begun. Luca Gheorghe, barefoot, and with his trousers rolled up to his knees, had come to him smelling of fish, worried, and obsessed by a thought. He had come with the fish from the brigade with whom Adam had remained.

"Comrade Preţiosu," Luca Gheorghe had said; "I've been wondering if it wasn't possible to take part in the meetings of the Party branch. I mean, we, Party members. You see, we come from several villages and

belong to the Party branch of the village, each in his own village. But the fact is, our life is spent more on sea than on land. And here at sea there's no Party life for us. Is that as it should be? I say it isn't."

Tall, dried-up, his face a dirty grey, his cigarette sticking to his lip, Preţiosu looked at him through the smoke. This tow-haired chap with the little chin was pestering him.

"I've been thinking that we, Communists, should not be absent from any Party meeting on board ship. And sometimes even people who're not Party members should be asked to attend. There are many fine people in the brigade who would learn a great deal, Comrade Preţiosu; it's more difficult to learn from one another; but they're eager to come to the fore, to understand life differently..."

"Who've you got in mind?" Preţiosu asked.

"Well, there's Emelian Romanov and one Cosma in his brigade; then Ghiţă, the helmsman; Pavelică and Suleiman; I know some ten men who'd do fine. You haven't talked to them to see the kind of men they are."

That had offended Preţiosu. It was true he had not talked to the fishermen but he didn't like being told that he hadn't done a thing he should have done; and after all, was that his job? He answered Luca Gheorghe as follows:

"You see, that's not right either, for you to come invading the Party meetings as you think fit. It wouldn't do, Comrade. I have no right to admit to Party meetings anyone except those coming from the district or region with a special authorization. Without an order from the Party district or region I couldn't let you, Comrade; I wouldn't even admit the comrade secretary of the regional organization! That's the rule of Party work!"

The fisherman had stood his eyes pinned to the planks of the deck and he wriggled his toes unconsciously. Then he raised his head and looked at Preţiosu with those clear blue eyes in his furrowed, sunburnt and bearded face, and said:

"Comrade Preţiosu, I haven't told you this only for the sake of our Party life. To tell you the truth, I have something else in mind, namely production. We need to speak among ourselves, to make things clear to ourselves, and to have things made clear to us by others — to make clear our outlook on production, for instance; because, you see, many don't even realize why they work, who they're working for, and how they work... As they have seen things done so they do them themselves."

"And how's your own work going ?" Preţiosu asked him.

He knew that Luca Gheorghe had not brought in much fish the last few days and wanted to snub him so that he should not criticize others like the clever fellow he was...

"Well, I've been unlucky lately; we've been where the sea was thirty, thirty odd fathom deep; but yesterday and today we went to shallower waters: 28, 29 fathom... we brought in two thousand; our brigade..."

Preţiosu puffed at his cigarette showing no surprise. Neither did he say anything. Two thousand meant more than a hundred per cent in excess of schedule.

The fisherman facing him gave a quiet laugh as he said:

"I've caught up with Emelian, perhaps I'll entice him to sea again in this way..."

A choir of deep, manly voices was heard from the store-room. The fishing-boats were swaying lightly on

the pink waters in the twilight. The cutters swung their masts lazily to and fro, as if measuring the slow lapse of time. Luca Gheorghe spoke again:

"But what I do and another two or three in charge of the brigades — all Party members, and called upon to be a credit to the Party — is not enough, Comrade. We must get the others to join in too, the others who are honest men but who waste their strength and make fools of themselves..."

"Get them to join you, then," Preţiosu answered. "Carry on propaganda work among them, speak to them. That's how the Party teaches us we should work, Comrade."

He had spoken emphatically, reproachfully. The other looked at him in surprise.

"How's that? Should everyone do as he thinks best? Not work in an organized way? Which party teaches us that, brother?"

Preţiosu was again offended.

"Comrade, I don't need to be taught by you. And as it happens, I've no time to spare just now. I've a meeting. But come to the organization bureau for a talk and we'll see what should be done."

"Right, I'll come," the fisherman said.

"And tell Comrade Jora that we expected him at the meeting, waited for him three hours. Tell him to come as quickly as possible."

"Good, I'll tell him," Luca Gheorghe answered without suspecting anything underhand. He left the ship and reached the fishing-grounds towards midnight and Adam came to the ship in the morning when the whole thing was over.

The evening before, when the lightning had not yet begun, Preţiosu had hardly opened the meeting and

announced the agenda when Uncle Marinică, the boatswain, had stood up and proposed another item for the agenda.

"What item, Comrade?"

"This: the work of the Party organization for increasing production."

This short, dried-up man with grey hair and grey eyes had remained standing. Looking around, Preţiosu noted them all: sailors; three stokers; mechanics in overalls begrimed with grease; Nicolau bristling like a hedgehog; the factory forewoman, a person of about forty wearing a spotless blue overall and a kerchief tied fast over her head; the cook; Lae and the store-keeper who regarded the boatswain with surprise; the others, however, looked at Preţiosu. What the devil was that? Were they agreed among themselves? He turned quickly towards Pricop. The latter, without moving his lips, whispered:

"That's not right...What production?"

Preţiosu raised his voice:

"What production, Comrade? Production in the factory?"

"Not only in the factory; the factory only works on what the fishermen bring in."

Preţiosu turned towards Prodan suspiciously:

"Have you spoken to him? Put him up to it?"

Prodan closed his lips tight and answered also under his breath:

"I don't put people up to anything..."

Preţiosu turned towards Pricop, who whispered again:

"It's not right. We're the ship's organization..."

And Preţiosu repeated like an echo:

"What you say is not right, Comrade Marin. We are the ship's organization, not the fishermen's organiza-

tion. It is not correct from the organizational point of view."

"But..."

"Come, why waste time over this. Who'll take the floor?"

"Wait a moment," Prodan put in. "Just one moment. I see comrade boatswain still standing. What do you want to say, Comrade?"

"The fact is this," the other said. "It might not be organizational but I see we don't produce half what we could. And the question is what do we do to remedy this? Our duty is to help the fishermen."

Preţiosu was surprised and displeased. 'What were they all doing, bringing in the fishermen? Do we need to saddle ourselves with them now?' But he heard Prodan say:

"It would be like this: we should discuss how we might help the fishermen to bring in greater catches. They produce food for the working people. Isn't that our concern? Isn't the people's bread our concern?"

"Of course it is," some of those seated on the benches said.

Preţiosu was vexed to hear Nicolau's resounding voice:

"That's what I call talking!" Nicolau was saying.

Prodan asked:

"Is that what you wanted to say, Uncle Marinică?"

"Yes, that was it," the boatswain answered and sat down.

Preţiosu spoke angrily:

"Who's chairing this meeting, Comrade Prodan? You or I? Comrade Pricop has the floor, maybe he too has something to say."

Pricop began in a calm and mellifluent voice:

"Comrades, it's a good thing to want to help the fishermen...but it is not right that we should embark on something we don't know whether we are able to achieve...Now, *are* we able to help them? We have our work cut out for us on board ship, we have our meetings and so many other things. Should we go from boat to boat and carry on explanatory work among the fishermen? We can't do it in the watch hours, which means that we shall have to talk to the fishermen during our rest hours...That is not as it should be, Comrades. Apart from which the comrade secretary spoke to the point when he said that we're the Party organization on board ship and not of the fishing fleet. We cannot interfere, it is not correct. My idea is to let matters be." His conclusion was pronounced sharply and contained a hidden threat.

"Nor can we be leftists, and interfere in everything, doing as we think fit. Whoever does such a thing, Comrades, will be criticized — criticized until he knows better."

He was laughing as though it was a joke, but everybody knew that it was not a joke but a threat. Silence fell. Then Preţiosu spoke again:

"Is everything clear, Comrades? Well, now let's start our discussions. Who'll take the floor on the first item?"

"One moment," Prodan said. "I propose something else. As there have been several opinions, let's vote if we should discuss the question of how to help the fishermen."

"Vote, Comrades?" Preţiosu asked. "Are we to behave as in a bourgeois parliament?"

"No, " Prodan said. "As we do here."

"Let's vote!" Nicolau cried out.

With loud voices the mechanics, stokers and sailors also called out:

"Yes, let's vote!"

Preţiosu exchanged glances with Pricop, then gave in and accepted to vote on the proposal put forward by the boatswain. Nicolau and Marinică raised their hands; the stokers raised hands black with coal and the mechanics put up their hands all greasy with machine oil. The cook looked around and seemed to be at a loss what to do. But after a while she also raised her hand...

"That's a majority," Prodan said.

"All right," Preţiosu put in. "The last item will be how we can help the fishermen. But I tell you beforehand that I don't agree: it's not correct."

"Pooh! it's correct enough, Comrade, for something must be done about it!" Marinică said curtly, stiffly.

Preţiosu gave him an absent-minded look then opened the discussion.

It had grown dark by now and there were flashes of lightning; the air was so stifling, one could hardly breathe. All the questions had been gone into and now the forewoman in charge of the factory had taken the floor and was giving an account of their work and saying that they could produce more.

"What's that, Comrade Mitea?" Pricop had asked, suddenly alert. "Tell us how you look at it?"

Comrade Mitea was a small, bony woman, neat as a chemist's assistant in her overalls, and with her hair tied well under her kerchief.

She was not a beautiful woman; only when she smiled was there something very feminine in her face. Now, however, her smile was uncertain as she answered:

"In two ways. One way would be for us to work in two shifts."

She looked around. A mechanic with a big deep scar across his temple encouraged her to continue:

"Go on, go on, don't stop now!"

"I've spoken with the girls in the factory; if the comrade captain and the comrade engineer would give us a few of the boys in the engine room, stokers or oilers, and some of those on deck, we'd have enough workers for two shifts. The girls would have to tend several machines at a time, but they say they'll try it; and if they have the stuff in them to try, the men'll surely not let the girls get the better of them."

She gave everybody a charming smile. The mechanics and stokers were discussing under their breath: wondering how her proposal would work.

"In the second place," Comrade Mitea continued, "the Party and trade union should not raise any more difficulties."

A heavy silence fell at that. These were preposterous, unheard-of words. How could she have said such a thing?

Nicolau became cross.

"What Party, Comrade?" he shouted. "What are you speaking about? Is the Party making difficulties?"

Pricop was pleased.

"Let her speak, comrade mate...let her unburden her heart..." Meaning: 'There you are! you've encouraged her and this is what you get!'

Preţiosu however raised his voice.

"Comrade Mitea, you'll please speak in a different tone or you have no business to be here."

The woman was now red in the face and her eyes were full of tears:

"I didn't speak against the Party, Comrade! The Party has enabled me to be rid of masters for I was maid-servant, and has made a skilled worker and a forewoman of me...And if I put more heart into my work, it will help me to rise still higher. The Party has changed my life. How can I have the least thing to say against the Party?"

She breathed deeply and continued:

"No, Comrades, I was speaking about Comrade Preţiosu and Comrade Pricop. And I also had in mind the question of the bonuses. I drew up a report mentioning the girls who were to be given bonuses. But they thought fit to change what I had written. Not that this is what worries me, for I'm not so clever that no one should change what I write. But they gave Margarita Chivu who filled 1,600 tins the same bonus as Angela Paraschiv who turned out 2,400 tins; and they struck off the list Aculina with her 2,000 tins. That wasn't right. The girls are discontented and are beginning to say that you get better rewards if you work less, and if you work more there is neither reward nor honour for you. And they also say: 'Look how lucky Lucica and some of the others are!' "

"I should like to know who's got this one to say the things she says," Preţiosu whispered between his teeth. "Why don't you have the courage to speak out openly, Prodan?"

Prodan sat with his elbows resting on the table and laughed a restrained, unfriendly laugh:

"Do you think it's necessary to egg people on to tell the truth? Do you think that nobody sees what you do? If you're Party secretary, it's as if you stand in the light of reflectors. Your very heart is visible."

Preţiosu clenched his teeth and pressed his lips tight. He listened to what the others had to say, appearing perfectly unruffled with all their criticism of him.

"The bonuses must not be given according to personal appreciation, Comrades," Marinică, the boatswain, was saying. "Especially Comrade Pricop proves to be too understanding, as he puts it, with everyone and gives in to those who come to beg for favours. It is the duty of a Communist to keep out of things like this, Comrades. A Communist must not be demagogical."

"Comrade!" Preţiosu shouted. "We criticize one another here, but do not swear at one another like bargees. I don't permit you to go on with this!"

"What? Did I swear at him?"

"As your habit is, of course. Do you think you're on board those English ships and are speaking to Negroes as you spoke to them in the past?"

Marinică was silent for a moment, though he remained standing. After a while he asked:

"Can I continue?"

"You can, but with principledness, Comrade, with principledness!"

Marinică sighed. He was very likely thinking that his reprimand was only a small portion of what was in store for him because he had insisted on demanding that another item should be added to the agenda. 'Principledness!' That meant he was not allowed to criticize Pricop. The principles consisted in not offending Preţiosu and Pricop.

Outside there were flashes of lightning, still with no sound of thunder. It was hot. The lighted bulb thickly covered with flies cast its shadows on the iron walls. 'Take care, Marinică, or you'll get it in the neck, me lad. You've got a wife, and children who're still at

school; and if they chuck you out, what about them till you get your next wage? No, Marinică, don't get sore with Pricop and Preţiosu; they're strong, they've harmed quite a few people and if you keep on as you're going you'll find yourself without your job as boatswain on the *October Star*, and disembarked and invited to find yourself another ship, Marinică, or even to take up a different job altogether...'

The port-holes became dark again.

"I think," Marinică the grey-haired, grey-eyed boatswain, who had worked on many vessels and crossed many seas said, "I think we must support the initiative of this woman: the mechanics will give two or three men; and we, on deck, can afford to do so too. The factory'll work swimmingly, provided it has raw materials. So we've again come back to the fishermen. They're the key to the problem. And if Comrade Preţiosu does not want to bother his head about them and Comrade Pricop treats them to demagogy and drink..."

"Comrade," Preţiosu roared, "don't make a mockery of this meeting!"

Another flash of lightning was seen. They were all silent. Preţiosu had shouted so loud that his voice seemed to echo in the room. Marinică said:

"That's not the way to convince me."

A mechanic laid a hand on his shoulder without a word.

"Have you anything more to say?" Preţiosu asked with self-control.

"I have, but I see it's of no use," Marinică said.

"Say it, Comrade," Pricop said blandly. "Unburden your heart to the full."

"Let others have their say, too," the boatswain answered without looking at him.

A stoker and then another, followed by a seaman rose in turn; they all agreed with the boatswain. Nicolau, the mate, spoke too. He was perspiring, for it was terribly hot; his straight black hair fell over his forehead; he had unbuttoned his thin short-sleeved silk shirt at the neck — he wore only a shirt, dungarees and wooden slippers — and spoke:

"The comrade boatswain is right. It is our duty to look after the men we work with. Even if they're not part of our organization, our bureau has a right to invite them to the meetings. They can learn a lot and we can help them a lot. More than Comrade Pricop, who has declared against it, dreams of. He speaks about going from boat to boat to enlighten them. Is that how Comrade Pricop envisages our help? That's not how it should be: we must call them here and discuss matters together, and help the best of them to fight against the disorganization prevailing on the boats and among the fishermen. Explain to them their duty towards... yes, towards the Party, even if they are not all Party members."

"Towards the people," the mechanic with the scar on his head added.

"Towards the people then! We're not near enough to them, Comrades, we don't behave as if we belonged to the same unit! And when the comrade boatswain puts forward a sound proposal, some of the comrades, such as Comrade Pricop, think only of shirking their responsibility."

He considered for a moment and then added:

"And not only Comrade Pricop, but also Comrade Preţiosu!"

A deafening clap of thunder was heard from outside. Pricop wiped the sweat off his face. He could no longer

endure it. He looked meaningly at Lae. Lae raised his hand:

"Can I speak, Comrade?"

Everybody had turned towards him. Lae began speaking with an isolence which concealed his embarrassment and with hypocritical elation:

"How do we stand here and listen to the things that some of the comrades have said? Are we discussing production and tins, Comrades, or the Party? The Party is trampled underfoot here. The comrade boatswain didn't even blink when Comrade Mitea said that the Party was raising obstacles. Nor did Comrade Nicolau. They've got something against Comrade Preţiosu, they object to him and that's all they think about and not the Party. I propose that the comrades be sanctioned. The three of them ! They have agreed among themselves; the other comrades know nothing about it. They agreed before the meeting what to say and how to say it, and who they were to attack."

"Am I one of them — I?" the woman in charge of the factory cried out.

"Not you, but comrade boatswain and Comrade Prodan. I heard you," he said, looking towards the latter. "I was sun-bathing behind the big lifeboat to the starboard while you were painting, and I heard you."

Prodan reddened as if he had been caught doing a shameful thing; and, as he was sitting at the table of the organization bureau, all the members of the organization saw him redden. Marinică turned towards Lae a cold, glassy look as he asked him: "And aren't we allowed to speak, you stool-pigeon?"

"Comrade," Preţiosu said resolutely. "If you interrupt again I shall propose your being expelled from the meeting !"

He was silent for a moment. Lae had sat down. The red was gradually disappearing from Prodan's face. Pricop asked for the floor and stood up, a frown on his face.

"Comrades, most unhealthy things have been revealed here. Contempt of the Party, Comrades, secret understandings between certain members of the organization... who while speaking about increasing production actually pursue who knows what aim... I propose that the bureau should be entrusted with examining the case..."

"Agreed!" the store-keeper shouted, raising his hand. Lae, too, raised his hand. And then another... And another, though hesitatingly. And the forewoman also raised hers, then she looked about her and dropped it. The men searched one another's faces; they were surprised, sullen, dispirited and disappointed. Several of the men murmured their opposition in gruff voices.

The sea was flooded with light. The flashes of lightning left no dark intervals between them. The woman said:

"Heaven defend us!" and put her hand over her mouth. The mechanic with the scar on his head laughed as he said:

"The lightning-conductors at the masts will do that!"

Then a strange thing happened. From somewhere there came an insidious, rustling noise and the savage roar of the wind broke out at once. Columns of cold air and spray rushed in through the port-holes. The ship leant five degrees, ten, fifteen degrees... An inkpot slipped from the table and fell to the floor, the portraits on the wall swung to and fro. Everybody rushed to close the port-holes, then crowded towards the exit to make for their several posts. The cook, who had nowhere

to go, sat as if turned to stone on her bench, and later began to cross herself. Preţiosu and Pricop were the last to make their exit. Preţiosu was whispering between his teeth:

"I think I've taught them a lesson... they must have agreed among themselves — have talked things over, blast them! I'll teach them..."

"Don't be in a hurry," Pricop murmured. "We must think things over carefully. We'll send the district or regional organization an informative note. Both Nicolau and the boatswain will get the sack."

The vessel had begun to throb under the impulse of the machines. They stood with the ship's side leaning to the windward. The pictures on the wall swayed this way and that. The book-case with its glass door rocked and then fell with a heavy thud; the glass broke and the books fell out. Pricop went at a run up the iron steps leading to the deck, Preţiosu close on his heels for he felt he had to stick close to him.

✦

Captain Haralamb had put a raincoat over his night-shirt and now stood on the watch deck. The rain streamed profusely over his head and down his neck and soaked his sockless feet in their slippers. But he was not aware of these things, being intent on something else. Nicolau had rushed up from down below and the captain had said to him:

"Go and rest. You're not on watch."

Preţiosu had come up too and so had Pricop. The captain gave them a cold welcome:

"Comrades, it's a bit crowded here; why don't you go to the cabin deck. The rain doesn't get you there and there's more space."

Without looking at them, his gaze following the white spears of rain driven obliquely through the air, and the white waves foaming on the dark sea, he spoke:

"Directions down the voice-pipe: dead slow."

Constantin carried out his orders, then pushed the telegraph handle that signalled to the engine room "attention" and "slow down." The ship was still leaning, the wind driving it to one side. The wind gave a deafening roar, the rain fell in cold sheets, flooding the decks. The captain stood with his hands behind his back, without speaking a word. The ship began to throb. Without raising his voice the captain asked:

"What does it show?"

His eyes intent on the big compass swaying imperceptibly in front of him, the helmsman answered in the darkness and quiet in which the copper binnacle of the compass shone with a secret light:

"Two hundred and seventy..."

"And before?"

"Forty," the man answered, adding as if to himself: "the wind goes round and round..."

The captain remained silent, a black shadow in the rain, on a seat of the watch deck which was leaning to one side like the rest of the ship upon which the wind and rain beat sideways.

"Go round to forty again, but very slowly," the captain said.

Beneath them sheltered in the passage-way over the engines those whom the captain had not admitted to the watch deck were speaking nervously (through the floor-grating one could see down below, as in a precipice, red-painted shining iron pistons and steel connecting rods, the glint of oily pieces of bronze and

diminutive mechanics very low down; and it was hot with the damp heat of vapour).

"See how we lean!" Preţiosu was saying. "We're not straight yet!"

The old chief engineer emerged from the precipice of the engines whistling as he slowly ascended the iron steps:

"Chirp, chirp, chirp. Do you think we're done for? Why, in half an hour it'll be all over: there's rain with it. Once on an old cargo boat, the *Bolivar* of Panama, when Haralamb, our captain, was second mate, we ran into foul weather in the Bay of Biscay with waves fifteen metres high. They swept the signal-room away with the captain, mate, helmsman and all — drowned the whole bloody lot of 'em; we didn't even have any masts left; we put the steering engine at the forehelm, tied four men to it for them not to be washed away; and Haralamb had himself tied there too and took us to Bilbao. A good captain. After that the companies all tried to get him; but he only wanted to come back home to be on one of our own ships. But, my lads, we were sick for ten days after that, all of us. What we're having today is just, how shall I put it, just a little high wind..."

The ship vibrated and throbbed with ever greater intensity.

"You see, it's as I've told you. She's straight now and going along her right course..."

XXXV

Adam came back to the ship in the morning when the wind had dropped entirely; the waves had calmed long ago, and the sky had become transparent. Preţiosu

told him that the organization meeting which should have been held with him had been impossible to postpone.

"But you didn't inform me," Adam said in surprise.

"Oh, yes, we did. Pricop sent word to you through a brigade which passed by Luca Gheorghe's."

"Nobody told me anything."

"They must have forgotten, to the devil with them," Pricop said with such simplicity that Adam started and looked searchingly at him. What did it mean? Why did they take it so lightly? He asked quickly:

"Who forgot? Who was to have brought me word?"

Preţiosu shrugged his shoulders and avoided answering.

"That was Pricop's task... he sent you word..."

"Aha ! And who was to have brought it, Comrade Pricop? Who?"

Pricop did not expect this. He pretended he had forgotten.

"Let me see... who was it..." he said, "I've clean forgotten. I've had so many problems bothering me since yesterday..."

"Let me help you then," Adam said unperturbed. "What brigade did he belong to?"

Feeling he wouldn't get out of it, Pricop decided to take the bull by the horns. After all he was covered, what could happen to him? The comrade instructor should have stayed on board ship.

"Let me see, yes, I know now. How could I have forgotten?" Pricop answered placidly. "My brother's brigade boarded the ship and it was through them I sent you word."

"Exactly who?" Adam asked.

"By one of the fishermen belonging to my brother's brigade..."

"Ah, so that's how it was... I remember their passing us last night. But no one said anything. Which fisherman? What's his name?"

"Well, the fact is," Pricop said in embarrassment, and yet with a certain amount of unconcern, even with concealed complaceny, "the fact is, I told my brother to tell you, or to have one of the men tell you."

Adam turned on his heels and made his way towards the prow. He had seen Simion Danilov there a short while ago for the latter had come to the ship with the catch. He found him and said:

"Listen, you should have told me something last night. Why didn't you?"

They faced each other — two fishermen in grey overalls, one of whom, Simion, the shorter, with a tormented face and sunken cheeks, lines about his mouth, and with unshaven beard, was fain to look up to the other who was extremely tall, withal a little stooping, with a severe, clean-shaven face and deep-set grey eyes, now shining at him from two caves. Simion had just been ripping open a white-bellied shark and had risen, with the bloody knife still in his hand. From the spindle-shaped body at his feet, with the long red rip along its white belly, oozed a brown black liquid over his bare foot.

"What's that you said?"

Adam repeated his question and Simion looked straight at him then without the flutter of an eyelid, with a disgusted, malicious look, a complacent and defiant hatred.

"I forgot," he said curtly, ready to laugh in Adam's face. Then he bent over his work again and continued to gut the fish, that he might weigh it and know how much he would get for it.

Adam returned to Preţiosu and Pricop who awaited him with calm satisfaction. Preţiosu began telling him how interesting the meeting had been, with elements hostile to the Party raising their heads... Adam asked for details. Preţiosu told him everything, and Pricop corroborated from time to time.

"Have you nothing written?"

The two looked at each other.

"Of course," Preţiosu said.

"Let me see it."

Pricop brought a report signed by himself and Preţiosu.

"Why didn't Comrade Prodan sign it?"

"Well, you see, he'd say it wasn't like that," Preţiosu said with a guffaw. "It doesn't suit him, of course, ha, ha!..."

Adam listened patiently, asked many questions, then left them and went to find Prodan, the boatswain, Nicolau and some of the mechanics. And he questioned them all:

"Why didn't you speak long ago? Why didn't you tell the Party?"

He understood it all: the men had elected Preţiosu and Pricop to the bureau on trust, without knowing them; later they had criticized them, becoming more and more violent in their criticism, but when the first instructor, and then a second and a third that had come on board had all been unable to remedy the situation, they had closed up and were waiting. If the two had been alone, the branch could have put things right; but there was also Lae, the store-keeper, and another two or three; also others who believed in Preţiosu and Pricop and did not seek to see if what they said corresponded to the facts. And now the very men who could have spoken and opposed the two most courageously were

compromised, accusations being brought against them so that they should no longer be able to make a good fight of it. Adam was certain that a Party investigation would have ascertained how much truth there was in the accusations brought against Prodan, Nicolau and Marinică. But Nicolau had already been criticized for his "commanding attitude" and so had Marinică; then there was the story of those clumsy words uttered by the forewoman of the factory which had evolved into a story of an "anti-Party attitude." This, too, could be cleared up, Adam thought. But how long would it take? What would happen by then? And what else were these two scheming?

It was only now that he realized what he had to deal with. He had felt from the very beginning that there was something wrong. Insufficient and irregular production, the complaints, the indiscipline were all signs of a deep-seated evil. But he had not expected this; no, not even when he had heard them speak ambiguously, turning every word into a weapon and a blow; and this they did with him towards whom they should have shown only good faith, an open heart and sincerity. For the moment, he felt like cursing himself for having gone with the fishermen.

'What business had I there?' Adam asked as he sat by himself on a bitt to the windward, being sure that here he would be left alone. 'What business had I there? Why did I allow them to do as they pleased here? Why wasn't I more careful, more alert? Why didn't I see through them from the first?'

He had gone out with the fishermen because he had formed the habit of going to the men's place of work. Whenever he had been sent to some enterprise or vil-

lage, it had been his way, after contacting the leadership of the organization, to speak to the workers at their jobs, both to the Communists and to non-Party people. That's how he had proceeded till now; but Pricop and Preţiosu had planned how the meeting should proceed, and had distorted facts to deceive the Party. How could he expose them? The Party investigation might be a long affair; by then they might even strike at him.

He began to have a shrewd guess of what had happened with the first two instructors. One of them "had got drunk with the fishermen and become mixed up in a scuffle," so he had been recalled. But had not the "fishermen" been Simion Danilov and one or two others like him? The second instructor "had made up to a girl in the factory and been caught by Preţiosu and Pricop." Who knew how much of it was true and how much had been faked in order to get rid of a man that inquired too much and could not easily be taken in. The third instructor had given a "positive appreciation of the work of the organization," and it had not fared ill with him. 'I quite believe it,' Adam told himself. And the old hatred again surged up within him. Here they were again. It just happened that he had known the Danilovs for a long time — since the old days. But those who did not know them — couldn't they have been taken in by them and been defeated?

There as here, everywhere, you butted against them and others like them, shameless, sly as the fox of the steppe, secretive, bound up in themselves, liars and hypocrites that had held their ground despite all the sifting; supporting one another without seeming to, spreading like bugs in the timber of a house, like mange in a flock. He had seen such people, but never such as they were here. 'D'you want to sentence me again?

And others as well? Do you consider one like myself who doesn't give in to you, who's not to your liking, who doesn't stand to attention before you, knuckle under, lie face downward in the dust to serve you as a stepping stone — a class enemy, the Party's enemy, even though he was poor but yesterday and a convict. Always the same, the same!' He clenched his fists and set his jaws as he faced the deserted sea and the wind blowing into his face. No, he would not endure this injustice. There had been enough injustice. Yes, there had been enough until now. Let there be an end to it. Maybe it wouldn't end suddenly by one blow; perhaps its end would come only gradually, step by step. 'But,' thought he, 'here, with my hands around its neck — the sly, lying shameless, ruthless thing that has trampled underfoot men and the care for men, and the love of men — here shall Vasile Preţiosu and Pricop Danilov and Simion Danilov and those of their stamp get their deserts, blast them! They shall get all they deserve!'

But how? For he knew now that not even he was strong enough to face such enemies. They could confuse the issues in such a way that the people at Constantza might for a time think they were right; and he, too, might be shown in dark colours and be tripped up, knocked down, and recalled to be replaced by somebody else — a weaker and less alert man who would surely be taken in. Such a man should be the eye of the Party committee and if the eye be blind how were the people at Constantza to find out things? And if he went to Constantza now and drew up a crushing report, that would be the opinion of only one man who would be faced by "facts": that Prodan was "dishonest," that the others had "commanding attitudes," others were "hostile to the Party"... whilst in the other camp

were those who "exposed" them and were "faithful sons of the Party": Preţiosu, Pricop, Lae. At this thought he sweated freely. No ! That could not be ! It was not permissible that such a thing should happen. But how was he to expose them and bring them to book by himself? No ! one man alone could not do it. Some more powerful force had to be found. Some power around him, here, in the fishing fleet among the sailors and fishermen...

He thought for long and tensely. The fishing fleet would soon return to Constantza to leave again five days later. Meanwhile Adam Jora seemed calm and resigned, neither too silent nor too talkative; Nicolau, Prodan and others expected him to tell them something, but he seemed to consider that they had said enough for the time being and there was no point in going over the same subject again and again; he would not go into any detailed discussion. Towards Pricop and Preţiosu he was very calm, took part in the bureau meetings, interfered as little as possible in what they said and decided, and seemed to be a man who had accepted defeat and only waited to return to land, draw up a report — a non-committal report, neither too cold nor too warm — and go about his business elsewhere "where he might fare better, not as he did here," as Preţiosu said laughingly.

XXXVI

About this time, during their last days at sea, some small things happened with no significance except for those who were directly concerned.

One afternoon after Emelian Romanov had weighed his haul and had written the amount of it in his note-

book, he waited to see how much Iermolai had brought in. The net rose full and heavy over the deck, and Iermolai himself appeared from down below, jumping the rails hurriedly in his clumsy, bear-like way. Emelian called out to him:

"Come on, Iermolai, and get going or there won't be any more lamp chimneys left."

Without answering, Iermolai drew out his knife and began cutting and dressing down some of the smaller sharks. Emelian watched him with a glint in his brown eyes. He suspected what Iermolai was after. The water hose was washing the fish without cessation, leaving them clean and white, ready to be sent down to the factory. Iermolai had found what he had been looking for. He drew something out of a shark: a fat, oily liver which he cut into slices with his knife. Emelian roared out in a fright:

"Hi, stay! wait till I bring you some salt!"

But there was no waiting for Iermolai. Grinning at the liver like an ogre, and with a "haw, haw, haw..." he suddenly opened his mouth and threw a slice of liver into it while Emelian, holding his stomach, shouted in disgust:

"Iermolai, they make cod liver oil out of it!"

"And what of it? It's good for me health! good for me health! Haw, haw..." Iermolai answered with great satisfaction.

"And aren't you thirsty after this?" Emelian asked becoming suddenly solicitous.

"Well, I am a bit," Iermolai answered his mouth full.

"Then let's go and get something to drink."

"Let's go."

They left the scene followed by Cosma. The moment they had turned their back Andrei's fair head appeared

from behind the rails. Seeing the way Iermolai was taking, he shouted:

"Uncle Iermolai, are you after the drink again, you blasted son of a bitch?"

Iermolai, however, had disappeared in the shadow of the passage-way under the cabin deck. Andrei jumped the rails and sped after him. Others appeared, quickly climbing the ladder, and followed Emelian and Iermolai. From below on the sea roars came up.

"Who's left their boats here? Untie 'em; we've come with our fish. Where are those Danilofca coves? Untie these damned boats, someone!" The Danilofca coves, however, were having a grand argument on the poop deck, Iermolai now and again shooting a quick glance at the store-room whose doors were padlocked, and sighing and twiddling his thumbs impatiently.

"D'ye think, he'll open it?" Emelian said laughing.

"Why shouldn't he?" Iermolai mumbled.

"Ye don't know him; he's the devil of a man."

Iermolai just then caught sight of the store-keeper who was looking at a pile of cabbages spread to dry on the hatch at the poop. He roared over his shoulder:

"Comrade store-keeper, come up here, do!"

The store-keeper came at a leisurely pace, his hands in his pockets.

"Why don't ye open the store-room, brother? Haven't ye got any more goods?"

"Why, of course I've goods," the store-keeper said and laughed — an unusual thing for him, for he was a sullen and even melancholy person. This laughter irritated Iermolai who said:

"What are ye laughing at, Comrade? You're glad not to open to us, eh?"

"Why should I be? I've no say in the matter. When I'm ordered to sell spirits I sell 'em. When I'm ordered not to sell 'em, I don't. What more do ye want with me?"

Iermolai sighed and said no more. Then he turned towards Emelian:

"You're right, man... He is the devil. What's he got against us?"

Andrei, the handsome, fair-haired lad, now appeared from the depths of the ship. He looked for Iermolai, found him and came up close.

"Uncle Iermolai," the youngster said pleadingly. "What the hell are ye doing here? Can't you see there's no drink for ye? Come back to work, Uncle Iermolai; I'm sick of chess, and I can't read all day... Come on and do yer bit... !"

"Not me," Iermolai answered lowering. "And leave me alone: me head aches."

"Come on, Uncle Iermolai, and to hell with yer head," the lad pleaded, "come and drop your line into the water again..."

"Put a brick in it, lad; and stop that foul mouth of yours," Iermolai snapped at him. Then: "Blast the bastard !"

"Who're ye swearing at?" Emelian asked.

"At Jora who's come to dry our souls for us..."

"No matter, Iermolai, let him dry yours a bit, you've kept it wet enough till now," Emelian said.

Iermolai made a face like a bulldog and shrugged his shoulders in annoyance. Emelian passed his fingers through his grey hair, pushed back his cap and drew a little away to where the mechanic with the deep scar across the temple was cutting some sheets of iron spread over the deck. Emelian sat on a bitt and watched

him attentively. In the end the mechanic noticed him and said:

"Have you come to the tailor's, Uncle Emelian, to be measured for a spring coat made of this material?"

"Make me a boat," Emelian answered promptly.

Then they both fell silent. Growing tired of watching, Emelian now began riggling his toes impatiently — he had taken off his rubber boots in the boat — finally heaved himself up, stretched his limbs so that his bones cracked and set out towards the stern. In passing Iermolai he gave him a punch, saying:

"Come on, man!"

But Iermolai, who might have been a wall that Emelian had struck, didn't budge.

"Come on, fellow!" he repeated.

"Where to? Iermolai mumbled sullenly.

"Let's do something, otherwise we'll bust with boredom."

"Let's do what?"

"What do you mean 'let's do what'? What can you do, except fish?"

"He can drink," Andrei, the young lad, said indignantly.

Iermolai jumped up to clout him but the boy got out of his way quickly and Iermolai, suddenly appeased, said:

"Now that he's done away with our pub..."

Smoking and leaning against a case, the storekeeper interposed:

"It's not me who's done away with it... and even Comrade Pricop was saying that we could leave the store-room open. But Comrade Jora said it should open only at noon. He's responsible. Comrade chairman fought his utmost... most understanding he is... Didn't come on board ship only yesterday..."

Iermolai and a few other fishermen standing about pricked up their ears. Emilian alone gave a jeering laugh.

"So Comrade Pricop's understanding, is he?" he put in. "As his father was when he had his pub at Danilofca."

The men began to laugh. When one of the Mangalia fishermen asked how things had been there, the Danilofca men explained the situation. All this time Emelian had been trying to drag Iermolai away.

"Come on, man," he said persuasively. "Let's go and do some work or this hanging about'll be the end of us. We weren't born to idle... D'ye hear, my valiant lads, come, or your hands'll never be fit for an oar again — they'll be as soft as a lady's... Now where can that Cosma be?"

"At the prow," Andrei answered hurriedly.

They made for the prow in Indian file, Emelian leading the way. Before them rose the mast of a cutter, swaying to and fro near the rails, with its big net loaded with ray hanging from the derrick boom: one of the brigades had sent its catch to the factory. With the roll of the ship the net swayed in the air, splashing the deck freely with sea-water, fish-blood and matter. When the net reached the deck, a young seaman wearing a rubberized cotton apron bespattered with blood rushed to unloosen it. Cosma went to help him, calmly and in silence. At the top of the factory stairs Margarita stood looking at them and trying to catch Cosma's eye. Cosma, however, failed to look at her. He had his work to see to — helping the lad from the fishery. Once he happened to smile at something the other said — he had a pleasant smile, both grave and childlike — which, with his quiet manner, himself so tall and handsome, filled Margarita with a restless discontent though she

could never really have expressed her feelings. Emelian had come up by now, and Iermolai, the fat fellow with a face as red as the starboard light, and the rest. The tow-haired young lad had rushed to help in weighing the fish and, standing there by the scales, Cosma shouted:

"Hi there, Uncle Emelian, Luca Gheorghe's brigade is ahead of us. See if we're not going to lose the emulation drive."

"Don't you worry, Uncle Iermolai'll win the blasted emulation all right," the thin, tow-haired youngster said jeeringly. At which declaration he raised a basket of ray heavier than a bag of cement which seemed a feather-weight to him.

Looking on Margarita thought: he has a face as pure as a girl's, but his language, God help him! — a fisherman without any schooling. And so was Cosma — an unschooled fisherman; they knew nothing about the "fine" life in Constantza; they had probably never gone to the "Sea Glamour" restaurant to dance to the music of a real band... And turning round, she went down into the factory; however, a vague dissatisfaction still lingered in her heart. Was there something she missed? What was it she wanted? She couldn't have said. Well, whatever it was she'd get over it... it was nothing much...

Lae had appeared on the deck dressed in his striped vest with his hair carefully combed and smelling strongly of eau-de-Cologne. His hands in his pockets, he looked about him: he was not on watch and had nothing to do. He went down into the factory. The girls were moving between huge, zinc-plated frying pans where thousands of pieces of fried ray had been left to cool.

On the long tables, endless rows of unsealed tins shone in the light of the electric bulbs; the tomato

sauce for the sturgeon swung up and down with every roll of the boat that tossed ceaselessly on the surge. The bulbs hanging from the ceiling swung to and fro, the hermetic sealing machine made a deafening noise, and the girls went on with their work, carrying baskets of chopped onions which they threw into great pots filled with sauce, or baskets full of pieces of fish ready to be fried; and when they called to each other it was at the top of their voices to drown the metallic rattle of the sealing machine. Some of them were filling the tins at tables and sang a fisherman's song.

Lae's eyes went over the girls. Margarita was watching the boiling tomato sauce. Lae crept up behind her and pinched her hip. Margarita gave a start and turned round prepared to box the pincher's ears. She recognized him in time however and only snapped at him angrily:

"What are you up to? Can't you see I'm busy? Leave me alone!" And pouting she turned her back on him.

Lae was offended and murmured:

"If that's how you treat me, I'm off. One'd think I'd done heaven knows what!"

"Well, if you come to bother me when I'm at work!"

Lae passed his hand through his hair, though carefully, so as not to ruffle the beautiful arrangement of locks and waves, and said:

"Now don't you raise such a shindy, for you're not such a great one at your work. Was it work you got your bonus for?"

The girl's face grew a fiery red and she turned towards him speechless for a moment. A little frightened by what he had said, Lae looked contrite. He tried to put his arm about her as he said:

"Wait a moment, girlie, don't take it that way..."

The young woman, however, gave him such a push that she made him reel. Together with the heavy roll of the vessel, the girl's push left Lae hopping on one foot, his arms desperately cutting the air in search of support. The only thing he could cling to was the handle of the copper. But the handle was designed for another purpose; it gave way under his weight and the copper overturned with a slow, mechanical movement, depositing the boiling sauce on the floor.

The fishermen on deck heard a piercing cry, then a yell, followed by an uproar of many voices. They came down hurriedly to see what it was all about. Some of the factory girls appeared on the steps carrying Margarita in their arms. She was weeping with pain wrapping the foot which had been scalded by the sauce with a dirty handkerchief that made an absolutely ineffective bandage. In their wake Lae was limping, sweating with pain, his hair all tousled, followed by some of the other girls and the forewoman of the factory who was shouting at him. Trying to justify his action and defend himself he said he had jumped into the sauce to get Margarita out of it.

"What business had you to be in the factory at all? Coming after the girls, weren't you?" Comrade Mitea was shouting.

"That's it, Aunt Mitea!" Emelian, who had heard the girls calling her "Aunt Mitea," roared out merrily. "Give him hell, just to teach him!"

Cosma who was weighing a big cod looked at Margarita over his shoulder as, all red with crying, she was being carried to have her scalded foot dressed by the nurse. Cosma appeared unaffected by the misadventure, serenely going on with weighing the cod.

"Hi, haven't you done?" Emelian asked impatiently, his leg already over the rails.

Behind him came Iermolai. And Adam Jora coming up the companion way asked in friendly surprise:

"What is it, are you going to start work?"

Emelian and Iermolai looked at each other in embarrassment as they sat astride the rails, then, with the same movement they raised their leg and disappeared on the other side. Adam Jora, however, leant over the rails and, as they were going down the ladder, called out after them:

"Don't forget to look in at the store-room!"

Preparing to jump to the deck of the cutter, the two men down below looked up with sullen faces, though Iermolai, who could not be angry for long, answered in a friendly tone:

"All right... you, heart of gall!"

Then, on the deck of the cutter, striking his breast with his fist, he secretively remarked to Emelian:

"See, he is here... right here in my heart!"

"Why, that one too?" Emelian asked. "Since when?"

"Well, ever since we went after those boats I've thought him a man — a real man, you know," he said, adding after a pause as he clung to the rigging to steady himself against the lively tossing of the cutter, while thoughtfully watching the behinds of the four young men coming down the ladder:

"The only thing is that he's got something against our drinking..."

✦

Several hundred metres from the cutter the fishing-boats of Romanov's brigade were being rocked by tall, rounded waves. The men in the boats were resting after a day of hard rowing on a choppy sea. A cool

wind blew from the west. The sun was setting over the already darkened sea.

Cosma and Emelian were alone in the boat. Emelian was sharpening a knife, while Cosma sat leaning against the frame of the boat, his elbows resting on the gunwale. He was looking at the strange, clear sky in the distance, his sunburnt, unshaven face lit up by the remote glare of the sinking sun. Emelian's face was in the shade. Sea-gulls were screaming near them. Now and again the crests of the waves were heard to break. The black back of a dolphin appeared for a moment between the restless waves, then disappeared. The sea-gulls sped away. Nothing was left but the solitude of the sea. In the other two boats tossing on the waves the men were probably sleeping or employing themselves in some other idle fashion.

Finishing with his sharpening, Emelian thrust his knife into his boot and muttered:

"Give me yours, too, I'll sharpen it."

He had to ask twice before Cosma heard him. Finally the latter gave a start and his far-away look again came alive to his surroundings.

"Knife? What d'ye want with it?"

"Give it me to sharpen."

Cosma handed him the knife and Emelian started sharpening it.

"We might have waited though until we got back to *Mother*," he murmured. "They've got a good whetstone at the fishery there. . ."

Cosma gave no answer. He sat motionless looking into the distance. Then Emelian, observing the knife more closely, said in surprise:

"But this ain't your knife. What have ye done with yours?"

Cosma frowned and answered without looking at him: "I lost it. . . "

"What d'ye mean you lost it?" Emelian, who was working diligently, again asked automatically. Cosma shrugged his shoulders and answered curtly, angrily:

"Well, I lost it and that's the end of it! What d'ye want with it?"

"I? I don't want anything. What's the matter with ye, man?"

Cosma did not answer, and they both remained silent. Emelian had not even noticed the sharpness of the other's reply. He had lately got used to seeing Cosma sullen and touchy for no obvious reason.

The young fellow had lost the calm and serenity of a little while ago. He now looked at the pale horizon as at something antagonistic.

"Uncle Emelian. . ." he said after a long interval.

"What is it?"

"I'm grieved sore. . . "

Emelian looked up as he said:

"What the matter, brother?"

"I'm grieved . . ."

"What about?"

Cosma gave a sigh and then mumbled:

"I'm in love with a gal."

Emelian did not speak. He was waiting.

"I'm in love with her and she won't even look at me, and yet, even if she'd have me now, I wouldn't have her. . . "

"How's that?" Emelian asked.

"I don't know myself... I like her — and — I don't... and if she was to come to me I'd have her and then I'd tell her: 'Get along with you; go where you want to

and don't let me see you again... don't let me hear about you any more!'"

He waited for a moment then continued:

"That's what I'd tell her. 'I don't need you,' I'd say, 'the very sight of yer makes me sick!'"

Emelian thought for a long while, then said:

"That's love. Just love. Is the gal on board ship? What's her name?"

"What d'ye want to know for, what d'you care?"

"Get along with you, you young fool," Emelian said quietly, without anger. "Just tell me so as I can understand."

"How could ye understand when I can't understand myself?" Cosma complained. "When I'm alone or when you're asleep, I keep thinking of her as she was, not as she is now; and I'd like to tear things, to break something..." He stopped, then resumed:

"There's nothing I can do about... Nothing!"

There was silence for a space; Emelian went on sharpening his knife. Then Cosma spoke again:

"Tell me what to do. You're an old man, Uncle Emelian; what shall I do with myself? What shall I do?"

Emelian did not answer. Cosma went on:

"Even if I'd killed her sweetheart... it'd have been in vain... I wouldn't have found any peace... and it'd have been still worse perhaps."

Emelian put down the knife and said:

"What d'ye mean, speaking of killing someone? Are ye mad?"

Cosma did not answer.

"Tell me, me lad, because a woman doesn't love ye, are ye to kill a man? Is he your property? Are ye his master?"

Cosma continued in his silence, his face lowering. Emelian relented. He thought for a moment, then shrugged his shoulders:

"What should ye do? There's nothing to be done... Ye just have to stand it until ye get over it..."

"I shan't get over it!" Cosma murmured with determination and frowned. "I shan't get over it."

Emelian looked doubtfully at him, then said:

"Be patient and ye'll see ye will. I say that ye will..."

Cosma sighed and sank into silence again. They both sat leaning against the boat-frame, facing west. The sea lapped against the tarred boards, rocking them gently. The sun had gone down leaving the horizon a reddish yellow — a warm, mellow, caressing colour. High up lay a mist of a bright enamel blue. And from the horizon flashed three immense rays of a reddish-orange light, three gigantic rays which gushed from the west and struck across the sky, the centre one passing above the zenith, the others branching out towards the sides of the heavenly vault and losing themselves in the distance. Three rays — so broad that they looked like heavenly roads, avenues of light — of fire that did not burn, separated by rays that were just as gigantic but of a calm deep blue.

Cosma suddenly raised his hand in the air. In that light it became yellow as if made of precious metal — a hand of gold. He looked at Emelian and, his golden hand still raised, he said: "See the sun on it."

Emelian found nothing to say. Cosma regarded his hand for a while, then dropped it. Suddenly, as if a thought had occurred to him, he rose. Emelian rose too and, very naturally they both relieved nature over the side of the boat, their faces towards the great glory

of the west. Then they again sprawled against the frame of the boat that stuck into their ribs, resting silently as they were rocked by the sombre sea under the glory of the sky. Later, Cosma gave a little sigh and smiled, and, his eyes looking vaguely towards the west, he murmured:

"I'll get over it."

"Ye'll get over it," Emelian said.

✦

A little later the chief engineer on the *October Star* came up from the engine room for a little fresh air. He went from starboard to larboard, where there was nobody, and stood there, his paunch prominent, his hands behind his back, looking at the stars coming out of the sea.

A shadow appeared round the corner of the cabins and sat down on a bitt. The old man felt annoyed, for his solitude had been disturbed. He began to walk up and down.

He passed the bitt on which the newcomer sat, his rubber-soled shoes making no noise. From one side the wind was blowing from the myriad stars above the horizon — the Scorpion was there and the Lion and Jupiter, burning red — while from the other side the steam hissed and whirled and whistled out of the open door leading to the engines.

The old man stopped in front of the bitt. A girl in overalls sat there, her sleeves and trousers rolled up; she had curled herself up, her arm resting on her knees and her forehead on her arm, and was crying. She probably thought she was alone. It was Margarita. Her foot was thickly bandaged. The chief engineer sat down by her and after waiting a moment asked:

"What's the matter, young woman?"

The girl gave a start and looked up frightened, then composing herself, began wiping her nose and sighed.

"What's the matter with you? What's happened?"

"N... nothing..."

"What are you crying for then?"

"I don't know..."

"What nonsense! You don't know? You just tell me... Now, come along, just tell me..."

He put his arm around her.

"Tell me," he asked again, "what's your trouble?"

"I don't know... I'm angry with myself... and sorry too..."

"Why?" the old man asked. A few days ago he would have said: 'Get along with you, and if you've nothing to do, scrub the floors of the factory until you've got over your hysterics.' Today, however, he asked:

"Have ye quarrelled with Lae?"

"No, we've not quarrelled," Margarita sighed, "but I can't stand the sight of him..."

"What's he done?"

"Nothing..."

"And you, have you done anything to him?"

"No... neither of us has done anything, only I can't stand him now."

"What's wrong with him?" the old man asked in surprise and also in something like vexation.

"I don't know, I've got nothing against him, but it's as if a bandage had been taken off my eyes... I don't like him any more, Uncle Hell, he's stupid and conceited..."

"And what do you want? A Prince Charming?" the old man asked.

"I wanted a sweetheart who'd love me and be... I don't know how to put it... and be good to me and..."

But instead of finishing her sentence, she started crying again. 'What's up with her?' the chief engineer asked himself in surprise.

"Well, girlie, it's difficult to find a man who really loves you... and is a good man as well..."

Margarita sobbed still harder.

"Now, now, what's the matter this time, what is it? Don't cry so..."

"How can I help it when I had such a boy and I treated him badly," the girl burst out unhappily.

The old man rose to his feet properly vexed:

"Ah, so that's it, is it ? Then you should know that it's not often in one's life that you come across a good man, and if you've been a heartless little fool, you'll have to pay for it now. In any case be a good girl and stop crying; and you'd better go to the nurse to see to your foot. She hasn't gone to bed yet. Don't stay here whining."

And he went away in a huff. But Margarita remained where she was on the bitt, sighing and absent-mindedly swinging her bandaged foot.

XXXVII

In those days when the sea was smooth and bright with the loveliest colours imaginable — a pale transparent blue, rose-tinted or an airy purple like mother-o'pearl — Adam spent his time at sea. The men had to be taught to organize their work, to fish judiciously and give the best turnover. You saw him sitting at the prow of a cutter, barefoot, in a pair of dungarees,

preaching at the fishermen and laughing with them. The cutter would rise on a wave and the fishermen's boat fall into empty space.

"That's it, Adam, speak to us from the pulpit!" joked Emelian Romanov from the pit that had been made in the water. But at that moment the boat leapt up, raising two sheets of water that drenched the fishermen. "And don't be so generous with the holy water, preacher!" he added.

To which Adam replied:

"You laugh, but how'll you manage to catch up with the brigades of Luca Gheorghe and Vangheli?"

"By tomorrow night," Emelian said, "I'll have caught up with 'em and — passed 'em!"

And he laughed winking at the others who guffawed loudly. Adam did not understand the joke, though he felt there must be one somewhere.

"Emelian," he said, "don't stop here at thirty fathom. Go where you find 32 or 34: that's where the sturgeon are gathering in a hollow. That's where the front-rank brigades do their fishing. Why don't you read your map like Luca Gheorghe and the others?"

"I follow me nose, I've no need of maps!" Emelian said stubbornly.

Adam shook his head.

"I don't want to force you; carry on in your own way this week and then we'll talk it over and see whether it's you who's right, or the map and the Piscicultural Institute."

Emelian threw out some dirty words at which the others laughed, but Adam continued quietly, patiently:

"I'm surprised at you, a front-rank fisherman, making fun of science."

"What science, Adam? I know as much through me practice as your entire Institute put together!"

The fishermen in the boat laughed again.

"You think he's got the better of me, don't you?" Adam asked good-humouredly. "All right. We'll discuss the matter again in a week. If that's not enough, then in two weeks' time. And if you still haven't seen my point of view, I'll try again. But I'll never rest until you do see it."

There was no retort to this declaration.

"Then you'll see what practice without science means, you land lubbers. It's just about the same as science without practice: not worth a rotten pike. But go on like this until you've had enough of it and then come to *Mother* and ask for the map."

And he left them a little perplexed, looking after the cutter which sailed away with a great roar of its engines, leaping merrily over the waves, and with a little man at the prow turning to look at them over his shoulder.

"He's laughing at us, blast him! and he's as stubborn as you make 'em," said Afanasie, a lad in Emelian's boat.

Feeling that he was losing face Emelian swore at Adam and added: "And don't you go by what he says; they taught him at the Party to speak like that. We'll do as I've said."

"It's none too well. . . " a fisherman mumbled.

Emelian looked at him threateningly:

"D'ye know better than me what to do?"

"No, Uncle Emelian, only. . . I don't know. . ."

"Well, if you don't know, then shut up, for I do! And now, lads, put your hand to those oars. That clever Jora has kept us talking too long doing

nothing... These Communists do nothing but talk..."

And at night-time, under the full moon which had just climbed out of the sea, though only half of it was visible, Emelian's brigade checked the fishing-lines of two neighbouring brigades, loaded all the fish of these brigades into their boats and let down the lines again free of their catch. And on the next day Emelian's brigade headed the list on the forecastle deck of the *October Star* where the results of the fishing were posted, while the other two brigades did not appear at all.

Then Emelian moved to the fishing-grounds several miles farther off and on the next day was topping the list again, ahead of Luca and Vangheli, while the brigades that had been fishing near them were not mentioned.

On the fourth day, Adam was returning on Luca Gheorghe's cutter to the brigade after the unloading of the fish and talking with the pilot Pavelică — a swarthy man with greying hair. In the glass-walled cabin, with the wheel turning slowly between his hands, his eyes on the compass, and Adam smoking a cigarette, Pavelică was saying:

" It's hard being at sea for 25 days of the month. You miss your wife and can't sleep thinking of her, until what with the heat and your thoughts you nearly go off your chump. Twisting and turning, lying on your back and face downward, it's all the same, you simply can't sleep."

Adam looked at him and saw that little wrinkles had appeared round his eyes, though Pavelică was quite grave. Adam laughed:

"But what are you to do? That's your work..."

"That makes no difference. You think how grand it'll be when you return home — a tremendous thing.

And then, when you're there, you find you can do without a wife. Your mind no longer runs on such things. And by the time it comes over you again, you are at sea once more — and then you get over it again when you shouldn't. . . "

Adam laughed. Pavelică sighed, his eyes fastened on a couple of dolphins swimming and playing about ahead of the cutter, appearing now to the right now to the left with sudden movements of their big, black backs and yellowish bellies. Now and again they completely disappeared and then would suddenly bob up at distances from each other and from the cutter.

Pavelică turned to Adam:

"Did you see 'em?"

Pavelică's manner was still solemn though there were creases about his eyes.

Adam, however, was laughing heartily. Pavelică, looking at him from the corner of his eye, went on:

"You know that we earn 600 a month, while the fishermen get 2,000, even 2,500. They say we work 8 hours a day but when that big-bearded Luca Gheorghe fishes night and day, d'you think I can sleep? And when I repair the boats at sea and go about with the fishermen who don't know what it is to sleep until they reach Danilofca, d'you think I can, and that everything's as it should be?"

"Didn't you raise this matter at the production conference?" Adam said.

"I did and nothing was done about it."

"That's where you're wrong, Uncle Pavelică. It was decided at the Ministry that you should be paid the same wages as the fishermen of the brigade. From the first of next month you'll be getting the same as the fishermen."

Pavelică turned round and looked at him:

"Did you do that?"

"The Party's regional committee wrote to the Ministry and the Ministry decided on it."

Pavelică was silent for a time, then he murmured:

"That's not bad. Not bad at all."

"It's as it should be," Adam said.

"Yes, you're right there; and people work differently with such treatment."

"Tell your wife," Adam said without looking at him. "Tell her when you go home. She'll be glad. . ."

Now Pavelică began to laugh. He had kept it back till then, but now he burst into one great hearty laugh.

"See! You're heading west," Adam said, his eyes on the compass.

An hour or so later they caught sight of a number of boats near each other.

"What are they doing there?" Pavelică asked, but received no answer from Adam, who, though straining his eyes to see what was going on, couldn't make out anything. Eight or nine boats were close together, with two cutters beside them; and the fishermen were standing up, waving their hands about and acting all together in an excited manner. When they drew nearer, Adam sped to the upper deck holding on to the mast, to where, from over the waters, a confusion of angry voices reached him. Coming up to them, he found Emelian and his brigade surrounded by the fishermen of two other brigades with smouldering eyes, angrily shaking their fists at him and shouting themselves hoarse. One of them who had been shouting in Emelian's face, turned round, stooped, and picked up an oar which he swung backwards, ready to bring it down upon Romanov. But the others stopped him and Adam inter-

vened to ask what it was all about. The men turned towards him shouting their explanation. They had caught Emelian " checking" other people's fishing-lines and wanted to throw him into the sea. Emelian, a sullen figure, and the men of his brigade, abashed and frowning, were standing in the boats and shouting back at the others, telling them to go to hell in a tone which betrayed some confusion.

"Tell me if I shouldn't crack his skull with this oar, just tell me that, Adam!" roared the one holding the oar, after which he turned again towards Emelian.

"You've robbed us of our catch, thief and old smuggler that you are!"

"Boo! Boo!" chorused the others in thundering voices anxious to jump into Emelian's boat and pitch him into the sea.

"Stay, you lubbers! Stay!" Adam shouted and, as he was taller than most of them, his voice rose above the din. "Stop your gab!" he called out raising his arms. "And let's hear things properly. Now what's happened? How did you prove Emelian to be the culprit? Is it really as you say?"

There was a gleam of hope in Emelian's eyes. Adam sided with him, intended to save him. Adam, however, did not look at him. He was listening patiently to what the fishermen said. Yes, Emelian had undoubtedly robbed the men.

"And shouldn't we drown him?" the angry fishermen asked.

"Now, isn't that going a bit too far? Why the devil should you drown him?" Adam said. "Where have you heard of such goings on? Take the fish from his boat and share it between your two brigades."

"But there's fish of our own in it!" the men of Emelian's brigade roared in protest.

Adam laughed:

"That's your look-out. Why did you get it mixed up with these men's fish. . . "

And while the fishermen loaded the fish into their own cutters, he climbed into Emelian's boat and seated himself. Emelian, rolling a cigarette, looked sullen. The others came closer.

"Well," said Adam, "that's where your practice has brought you."

"Damn you," Emelian mumbled. "That's not the way I treated you in the past. But you've forgotten."

"You sided with me. . . but I was innocent," Adam said. "And it was only right you should've done. If I sided with you now. . . it would not be the same thing, would it now?"

Emelian was silent.

"Would it, old chap?" Adam asked.

The other, however, remained silent.

"Speak up!" Adam said. "You aren't afraid of me?"

"No," Emelian mumbled curtly.

"He's ashamed," Afanasie, a lad of Emelian's boat, put in.

Emelian, who had been thinking, suddenly burst out:

"It's all your fault!"

"What d'you mean my fault?" Adam asked.

"The fault of you, Communists!"

"And how d'you make that out, man?" Adam queried good-humouredly.

The others were interested, so they drew near to listen. Now, Emelian was no pup. He knew how to "put things."

"Well, if fishing was mechanized," Emelian said avoiding Adam's eyes, "nobody'd bag another's fish! D'ye think you could, with a machine, and mechanical trawls and drift nets? You won't put a stop to adding another's catch to yours until it is."

The men looked surprised. Listen to him! Damned clever chap Emelian! He was right too. Adam laughed but continued more gravely, turning to the others:

"Why, he's inferring you fishermen are nothing but thieves, lads!" Then: "I guess, Emelian, you'll fare pretty rough today. D'you mean to say fishermen have no decency and cannot keep their hands off another's property? Why, honest men'd make bacon of you if they heard you."

"D'ye want to say we're not honest?" the fishermen of Emelian's brigade snarled.

Adam laughed at this:

"Oh, you're honest enough," he said. "You just happened to put your hand by accident into your neighbour's pocket... but otherwise you're good lads."

They all laughed. A devilish clever chap, this Adam!

"Emelian," Adam said. "We shouldn't wait for fishing to be mechanized to be decent. We, the honest chaps, are clever; but a thief's a fool. Look at you, for instance... You worked yourself to death drawing up your neighbour's fishing-lines, and all you've got out of it is being put to shame. That's what thieving amounts to. Hard work and no gain in the end, perhaps. Thieving's profitable only in capitalist countries, and not even there unless you do it in a big way. It's then you get decorated. But if you pinch as the poor do, you're jailed — even there. Now, if you'd added two or three more lengths of line to yours, you'd have caught just as much fish as you bagged and it would have been

rightfully yours, and everybody'd have said: 'A splendid fisherman, that Emelian — no better fisherman!' Whereas they swear at you, spit at you and want to drown you. And in the village, too, they'll look down upon you."

"If I lengthen my line and have only a poor catch, I don't do much," Emelian said with a frown.

"But if your neighbour has had no luck? Why, you might check a thousand fishing-lines for nothing. Doesn't it come to the same thing? You lengthen your line and fish as you're directed by the map of last year or of a couple of years ago, which tells you where to fish and how, and the quantity of fish that has been caught. *You* don't know exactly where the cod foregather. But the map does."

"That's true," a fisherman said. "They go to their favourite places as people go to church on Sundays."

"No," Adam said. "I'll tell you how it is. They hold a meeting and one of 'em says: 'Citizens, we'll rest here a bit for there's plenty of shells and little fish, and besides, Emelian Romanov, who'd be the death of us, checks someone else's line a little way off!' "

After this Emelian said no more. Adam continued lecturing him a little longer, then climbed back into the cutter and sailed away towards Luca Gheorghe's brigade. On his way he thought of the men of Danilofca and how they were little better than children; and there was both mirth and sorrow in his thoughts. Sturdy, courageous workers they were, and as clever as you could wish, though at bottom children still. Perhaps if he'd not been schooled in prison and on the quays of Constantza, nor known trade-union work and, subsequently, Party work, he'd have been just the same. The world was far bigger and altogether different from what

some of them thought. Later, as he was having his meal on Luca Gheorghe's cutter, with Pavelică feeding the fire under the steaming cauldron with chips of wood, he told Luca Gheorghe about it all. The fisherman passed his fingers through his fair, short-cropped beard.

"It'll blow over," Luca Gheorghe said. "D'you know how many lads from our village attend Party school? Some twenty or thirty. And one hundred of them attend the navigation school at Mamaia. You'll see how people'll change in a few years. Look at young Cosma that you made head of the youth brigade. And what was he a year ago? A savage young cowherd of the Danube backwaters who knew nothing. With Emelian it's more difficult. D'you know what he did in that time of famine? Transported wheat in his boat, hoisting his sails, and using an old motor from the war, which he put on the sacks of wheat. You'd be surprised at the trade he did. Then he went to Constantza on the spree with half the fishermen and drank all he'd made. His wife didn't half lay it on, but he only laughed, lying on the floor like a log. He's a good-hearted chap and free with his money, but he does go the pace sometimes. . . though less and less now, it's true. P'raps after what you've told him he'll quiet down a bit. Oh, and listen!" Luca Gheorghe suddenly lowered his voice so that Pavelică shouldn't hear, "what about the helmsmen's wages? We're ashamed, you know; they work the same hours as us and get a third of what we do. . . "

Adam told him what he'd learnt and Luca Gheorghe turned his square face, with its handsome, smooth features and short curly hair towards the boats bringing the fishermen to their meal and shouted out the news.

"That's good!" they said. "And only fair!"

Adam was silent. He rejoiced within himself, though he did not express his joy. Luca Gheorghe invited them all to the meal: fried sturgeon sprinkled with vinegar, to which they helped themselves with their fingers.

"Come on, brothers," he said, stuffing his mouth with bread and fish. "If your hands hurt, let your bellies rejoice." And he laughed broadly saying to Adam: "We work like oxen under the yoke, eat like wolves in a sheepfold and live like lords in their palaces."

"At home, not here," a young fellow murmured.

"D'ye want the boat to be a palace?" Luca Gheorghe asked. After which he turned to Adam again. "A boat can't be like a drug-store, you know that. Back home in the village though, my home's fine. If you earn well, you can keep your home nice. Everything in mine's as clean as a new pin."

"His wife makes him leave his boots on the verandah," Mihei said, which Luca Gheorghe pretended not to hear.

"And in a year or two, I'll have a parquet floor as they have in town! The furniture I have already."

"Yes, he's got a wardrobe with a glass to it, to see himself when he trims his beard," Mihei said.

Luca Gheorghe was not disturbed by the remark, but went on:

"And I'll have a good cellar to keep my wine cool in the summer. "Wine's better than brandy, whatever Iermolai says, and it's a mug's game to get drunk — a glass or two perhaps."

"Or three or four, or even ten," Mihei put in.

". . . just to warm myself up and clear my voice for singing. When I was like these youngsters," Luca Gheorghe, who was some 45 years of age, went on, "I

sang in church. Now that I no longer go to church I sing at home."

"Yes, smutty songs," Mihei said.

"Stop it, man!" Luca Gheorghe bawled out, finally becoming angry. Then, addressing Adam: "Don't you believe it. I've got grown-up daughters at home and they don't tolerate bad language."

"But your wife, Uncle? Phew! how she knocks him about, Uncle Adam — beats him to a jelly!" Mihei put in again.

"Yes, there's truth in that," Luca Gheorghe said proudly. "A fisherman who's not afraid of his wife is no fisherman. Some are afraid of God, others of the militia; I'm afraid of my wife."

"And she's such a tiny one, Uncle Adam; only a little bit of a thing, thin and small, and yet she gives it him like anything."

"Of course she does — I shield my eyes, show her my back and she lays it on fast and thick until she grows tired. Then she begins to cry, and I know it's time to have my say. 'Look here, woman, can't you speak to me, tell me what's up, criticize me like a reasonable being?' I say. 'Aren't I a reasonable man? Then pass judgment on me, but don't land me so many!' And when she hears that she goes for me again with her nails and boots this time, for that makes her still more wild. But in the end I'll teach her to criticize me. If only she wouldn't wear her boots when she kicks at my shinbones," Luca Gheorghe sighed. The men around had tears in their eyes with laughter. "Yes, it's a fine life some of us have," Luca Gheorghe said, staying his masticating for a while and leaning against a water keg. "Why don't you come back to the village and be a fisherman once more, Adam?"

"Well, I've got used to my work," Adam answered with a smile.

"And what d'ye earn?" Luca Gheorghe asked, to which Adam named a figure that ran into only a few hundreds.

"Why," said the other, "I earn two or three times more than that, sometimes even four times. Come back to fishing, man, along with us."

"But, you see," said Adam, "I — how can I put it — I like this work, I couldn't give it up. . ."

"No! I only asked to see what you'd answer," Luca Gheorghe returned looking at him. "Don't take it the wrong way. . ."

Suddenly, Adam, looking out over the sea, asked:

"What was that?"

"What was what?"

A faint but prolonged roar was heard, followed by another.

"What can be up? Sounds as if someone's being killed. To the boats, lads! "

✦

Half way through the morning, Iermolai, who had Simion Danilov in his boat and also one Tihon, said:

"Tihon, me lad, see if there's anything left in that sow there."

"The sow" was a fat bottle that usually contained brandy. It was empty.

"Not a drop, Iermolai. When did ye finish it?"

"I? I haven't touched spirits for God knows how long !"

"Must have drunk it last night while we were asleep," Simion mumbled gloomily. "And I'm dying for a drink. . ."

"Drink some water then, " Tihon said.

At which Simion grimaced.

"D'ye hear him, Brother Iermolai?" he asked.

"I do hear, Brother Tihon, and I'm not surprised at His Reverence," Iermolai said. "He's a decent man. Now a decent man's not afraid of a glass of brandy. Well, he's afraid, yet is still a decent man, I don't know how that can be..."

"I'm not afraid of a glass," Tihon said. "But it don't do to work with the smell of spirits up one's nose and in this heat..."

"Nay, nay!" Iermolai roared, striking his chest with his palm and making it sound like a drum. "Brandy's a life-giving drink, Brother Tihon — clean and invigorating, and makes one strong. But drinkers of water like Yer Reverence — pah! they've no strength in 'em."

Tihon shrugged his shoulders with seeming indifference and remained silent. The other two going on with their work also fell into silence. But Iermolai was thinking. Suddenly he said:

"Simion, any fishermen from Constantza about?"

"Yes: two boats — over there."

"D'ye think they need any fish bait?"

Simion looked at him questioningly, then grinned:

"Aye sure... if a kind soul has any to sell..."

"You rotters!" Tihon threw in. "So you would sell our bait?"

"And what of it, is it yours?" Simion asked.

Iermolai was embarrassed and kept quiet.

"No, it's not mine," Tihon answered, "but provided by the State that we might earn our living... We can't do it, brothers, it'd be playing a dirty trick."

Simion cursed freely, then looked at Iermolai waiting for him to decide the matter. Iermolai, however,

had his eyes on something at the bottom of the boat. But there was nothing there but dry silvery scales sticking to the dial on the boards. Simion said no more till half an hour later when Iermolai sighed and said:

"A drink of brandy'ud be a fine thing now..."

"You're a damn fool," Simion mumbled.

"So ye're at it again?" Tihon said who had been thinking that nothing would come of Iermolai's yearning. He knew, however, he was mistaken when he heard him say:

"Well, we might sell half of what we have. Half's enough for our own hooks."

"Iermolai!"

"Keep your mouth shut!" Simion snarled at Tihon.

Something like an hour later, with the boat swaying gently, Iermolai sat looking at the sky in a happy state and singing softly. Pondering over something that had been on his mind for many days and nights, Simion sat frowning, while Tihon, who took his liquor badly, was lost to the world. They had sold the whole basketful of bait and had drunk three bottles of spirits between them. Iermolai one and a half, Simion one and Tihon a half. Iermolai was feeling full of tenderness towards everybody, and seeing Simion's gloom — with eyes that had lost all expression — he took pity on him and began trying to console him:

"Don't worry, Simion," he said. "Such is life, and it can't be helped. Did ye want her to stay with ye? Well, she couldn't, for ye're a dog, Simion, ye know, and enticed her into marrying ye. So it wasn't nat'ral that she'd stay with you. And the other's a decent chap — a devil of a man — but decent all the same; and it was right that she should go to him. Don't take it so

much to heart: ye're a dog, Simion, but I like ye, and it's here, right here in my heart that I hold ye..."

And striking that chest of his that resounded like an empty case with his fist, he made as if to kiss Simion. But Simion, pale with anger, started up and caught Iermolai one over the mouth, sending him rolling backwards on the bottom of the boat.

"I'll kill ye!" Simion hissed, his eyes all bloodshot. And he began to grope for his knife.

Iermolai got to his feet and clutching Simion by the throat with one hand gave him a blow on the temples with the other making him reel giddily. Tihon jumped up to separate them, but Iermolai punched his head too, and with such force that he fell backwards into the sea. Simion was again feeling for his knife, but Iermolai struck him again and again. Simion now took him by his throat and tried to choke him. But Iermolai's neck was strong and thick and muscular. And yet the pressure of Simion's fingers turned Iermolai's face purple and caused his eyes to protrude. To ease the strain he raised his leg and kicked Simion full in the stomach which sent him toppling into the sea. Alone in the boat, Iermolai began to laugh with real enjoyment, holding his heavy paunch and, as he looked at the two men in the water up to their mouth, swimming towards the boat, their eyes protruding like frogs' eyes, a wild mirth took possession of him. To amuse himself, he took an oar and tried to whack them on the head, or to push them under the water with the end of it. The attempts of the other two to ward off the blows or get hold of the oar filled him with delight, especially when they tried to seize the oar, for then he would tantalizingly move it out of their reach, though only far enough to induce them to make another attempt. And then Iermolai would whack them

again with uproarious mirth. Tihon, the least drunk of the three, was the first to understand that this play was no joke and began to shout for help.

The two boats, into one of which the whole of Luca Gheorghe's brigade had jumped and the other with Adam Jora at the helm, soon arrived on the scene skimming swiftly over the water with rowlocks creaking, the oars splashing and the lads gasping in their effort. Luca Gheorghe's boat bumped into Iermolai's, upsetting Iermolai who fell on his buttocks, the oar still in his hand. In a moment, however, he was up again wielding his weapon wildly in the air, ready to bring it down upon the head of anyone who should dare to draw near. Adam stopped to fish out the two swimmers, then roared at Iermolai to give over. Looking over his shoulder, the latter stayed his play, upon which Luca Gheorghe jumped into his boat and struck him on the back of his neck making him reel and lower the oar, which Luca Gheorghe wrenched from his hands.

"Hey, what are ye doing, pitching into one like that?" Iermolai asked aggrieved. "What kind of a Communist d'ye think ye are?"

He was hurt and offended and seemed ready to cry...

"And if I'm a Communist must I sit by and see you kill those two?" Luca Gheorghe asked angrily. "Aren't they fishermen like you? What have they done to you?"

Thinking it over, Iermolai found he didn't know how the trouble had begun, which quite upset him.

"I'm a wicked man," he sorrowfully admitted. "Brothers, forgive me, and let's be friends again."

And much against their will, he kissed Simion and Tihon who, dripping wet, giddy, purple in the face, refused to accept his friendly overtures and swore at

him like madmen. The others began to laugh. There was blood on Iermolai's lips and beard from the first blow Simion had dealt him, and he had now painted red the faces of the other two. Seeing their bloody appearance, a new wave of penitence seized him, while the others continued to be amused. An hour later they were alone again — left to go on with their fishing but now with borrowed bait. Iermolai was still feeling penitent. Simion had calmed down as if nothing had happened — he had avoided looking at Adam Jora — and Tihon was ready to fall asleep.

Some days after this there was a meeting of the fishermen on board ship to discuss the disgraceful behaviour of Emelian and Iermolai. A number of the men proposed that Emelian should no longer be brigade leader and Iermolai no longer be considered a high sea fisherman. But both of them with tears in their eyes pleaded to be allowed to make amends for their mistakes. And indeed, from that time nothing could be said to Iermolai's detriment: he continued to drink but not during work hours, and his catches began to be exceedingly good. Emelian's brigade, too, had another 500 hooks added to a new length of line and later a thousand, upon which he suddenly found himself topping the competition list on a par with Luca Gheorghe, Vangheli and the youth brigade headed by Cosma. Adam was always out at sea and whenever he saw them he talked to them as before without the slightest change in his voice or behaviour. Within himself he thought: 'The fact is we have only just begun. There's a great deal left to get through.'

After each fishing expedition, he returned to Constantza for five days, always finding it strange at first that the earth should not dip and rise, nor roll from side

to side. And just as he became used to the land, the five days were up and he left for sea again.

✦

One night, Adam was rowing in Luca Gheorghe's boat, with Gheorghe checking the line in silence. Adam rowed in silence too. He was both tired and thirsty, and was thinking: 'What was my mistake? Why didn't it go? Why have they done as they pleased so far?'

A fat yellow moon floated low over the sea. There was not long to go till dawn. Adam who had worked all night sat looking at the water swelling in soft, silky, rounded waves: listening to the plash of the oars as they cleft it, and thinking how thirsty the sound made him feel. The sea looked cold and green with masses of air bubbles in it as in mineral water. Adam liked mineral water. Whenever he was at the canteen of the Party regional organization he ordered cold mineral water which was full of bubbles and pricked the tongue pleasantly.

But the water he looked upon was not mineral water: it was salty, bitter sea water, and even though your tongue cleft to your palate, even though your throat was parched and burning, you could not drink it.

You might drink from the keg; but the water there was warm and tasted of the cask.

Adam watched the dip of the oars, heard their soft plash in the water — that water could not be drunk. You might look at it, dip your hand into it but it couldn't be drunk.

'That's how my work has been,' Adam was thinking. 'I am very near to a solution but I haven't solved anything. I've done a great deal — and yet I've done nothing. Where's my mistake?'

Luca Gheorghe said: "See if we don't get a drink of cold water! Pavelică's let a bottle over the cutter's side to get cold."

And then he spoke again suddenly: "Listen here, Adam, I've spoken to Preţiosu and haven't got anywhere."

"Well...and are you going to leave it at that?" Adam asked.

"How do you mean?" the other murmured winding up the line.

"I mean...is that all you intend doing about it? Are you going to give it up?"

"Why don't you do something? Tell the Party what's going on here?" Luca Gheorghe said turning towards him his head upon which the moonlight shone, making of his hair a halo of brilliant metal.

"I've spoken about it," Adam said. "But the question is what are you going to do? Are you waiting for things to settle themselves, and stand by idle? Is that what you call being a Communist?" Adam asked in a tone which made Luca Gheorghe ponder for a moment in silence.

"Shall I tell the Party?" the fisherman asked.

Adam shrugged his shoulders:

"Don't you know your duty?"

Luca Gheorghe again turned his back on Adam and, leaning over the water, went on winding up the fishing-line.

When the moon had dipped into the sea, they started on their return journey to the cutter and, though tired, rowed with great strokes, that they might be back quickly and get some sleep.Once on the cutter they drew up a bottle from the sea. It was as cold as if it had been kept in ice. Luca Gheorghe uncorked it and held the bottle out to Adam. The latter took a mouthful but spat it out: the water was cold but salty.

"The devil take it! If the sea water hasn't got in through the cork!" Luca Gheorghe said with annoyance.

Adam, however, made no remark. He stretched himself out under a blanket on the deck of the cutter, his throat still parched with thirst.

'That's where my mistake was,' he told himself, 'not relying sufficiently on the masses. I wanted to do everything on my own.' So Adam thought as he was falling asleep. And in his sleep he dreamed that he folded Uliana in his arms and that she said to him with an expression of savage hatred: 'Go away, I've finished with you, you rotter, leaving me as you did!'

Adam groaned in his sleep with a feeling of great guilt which he couldn't well define, as it happens in dreams. Then the dream ended and Adam fell into a deep, heavy sleep.

In the following days when the fishermen asked him:

"Why don't you do something about things here? Why doesn't the Party do something?" Adam answered:

"Who's the Party? Aren't you the Party? Why do you wait for everything to come from higher quarters? I do my duty and report on matters, but I'm only one man. Are you yourselves doing your duty?"

The men were silent.

And shortly after, the *October Star* and the fishing fleet sailed back to Constantza.

XXXVIII

The second secretary of the regional committee was having a talk with Adam concerning the situation of the fishing fleet. He did not expect any surprising reve-

lations — had no reason to expect any. He knew that Party work on the *October Star* was in a bad way but usually the remedy in such cases was not too hard to find: a few drastic measures quickly changed the situation.

And yet he was not following very well what Adam was saying. Seated upright in front of him, his knees close together and his hands on his thighs, Adam Jora was looking at him with grey eyes deep in their orbits under black eyebrows, and speaking without making his drift plain. The secretary would have liked to read in that manly, severe, oval face, what its owner was really thinking. Suddenly he stopped him and asked:

"All right, all right ! I understand you want to go out again and make your final report only after that. That's quite all right. You say that for the present you cannot give a well-grounded report on the comrades there and on the situation. Well ! I understand that too. But in that case why did you come here? Was it just to see me?"

And he looked at him inquiringly with an ironic smile.

Adam did not turn a hair. This was the decisive moment. He had been waiting for it day and night. Day and night he had been thinking what he would say. He had spent long hours of painful strain, of vain seeking. Then suddenly there had been a flash of joy when he had found out what he should propose. That would be a crushing proof. He would crush him, he would grind him into powder. And he was sure that it would be only justice. It would not be after his own wish. It would be only justice.

For days and nights he had thought over how he would express himself. He had shaken with fear at the thought that what he had to say might not be well

received, that he might be told: 'Yes, but later.' And now, he was confronted with that very danger. If it was postponed, after this next voyage, for instance, they would perhaps find a way to recall him from the vessel, to gloss things over, to implicate others so that they should be disgraced for ever... Everything depended on the way he would speak now and on the way his words would be received.

He cleared his throat and said:

"I have a proposal to make, comrade secretary ..."

The secretary looked at him searchingly. He had read the second letter of Preţiosu and Pricop; he had read it to the bureau members as well. And they had all decided that, in spite of it, the instructor Adam Jora was not to be recalled, that maybe the comrades there were afraid of criticism which was the reason for the instructor not being to their liking. And should he be recalled merely because he had worked once without seeking the advice of others, though with satisfactory results? No, he should stay where he was and report in writing on his return. And now he had returned and the devil knew what was the matter with him. Why didn't he speak out?

Adam thought of all those working hard in the fleet — working with the sweat of their brow, in solitude, and away from home and in great peril. He thought of Emelian Romanov and Cosma, of Luca Gheorghe and Iermolai and Andrei, the lad who swore as he, Adam, had sworn in the old days. He thought of their hearts, sometimes complicated and troubled, at other times honest and light. He thought of their lives, and of their lot; of theirs and their children's. He thought of those on board who had worked for dozens of years at sea for a seaman's wage which had never enriched anyone in the thousands

of years that sailors had worked on vessels belonging to others than themselves. He thought of himself when he was a young man, and of those years of his youth that he had languished in prison. And he thought of the Uliana he had lost.

"I've a proposal to make, comrade secretary. Party work on that ship — on the *Star* — is in a bad way. There are comrades whose cases I think should be inquired into by the cadres."

The secretary had in his drawer Pricop's second letter. The one which told him about the "hostile, anti-Party attitude of Comrades Prodan, Nicolau, Mitea," and about the "sanctions that would be given." He was astonished Adam had not spoken about it, and now he thought: 'He knows about it but he's a careful chap. He wants to be sure of facts. After that he'll ask for an inquiry. That's all right.' However he asked:

"Who are the comrades?"

Adam looked him straight in the face for a moment, then murmured:

"To tell you the truth it'd be better if you did not have their names from me."

"Who's to give them then?" the secretary said in surprise.

"The mass of Party members in the fishing fleet," Adam said with great simplicity.

Back home with his wife, Emelian sat at table joking and laughing in a thick voice with his children — his wife serving them and talking volubly. Emelian Romanov did not know his fate was decided at that moment, and neither did Cosma, Iermolai, Marinică, the boatswain, nor the captain. Nor did Pricop and Preţiosu who just then were telling the men at the inquiry office that they wanted to see the secretary — who was talking to Jora.

Nor did Spiru Vasiliu who was seated at his desk looking absent-mindedly out of the window at the masts and smoke in the port; nor did Zarifu who was casting up accounts also seated at a desk and writing, by mistake, instead of the total, the freight for grain in 1938 in pounds sterling — none of them knew that their fate was decided for good.

"This is in close connection with my proposal, comrade secretary," Adam Jora said. "The fleet's output is much smaller than it might be because political and trade-union work is in such a bad way."

"And why is that?" the other asked, glad to hear something clear and concrete at last.

"In the first place because the fishermen are not organized along Party and trade-union lines," Adam said just as simply as before. "Production goes on in this way: the fishermen do the fishing, and the factory tins the fish. The factory makes as much tinned fish as the fishermen bring in. The ship has its branch while the fishermen haven't."

"How's that?" the secretary asked.

"They're considered to belong to the branch organization in their own villages," Adam said, "and might be working peasants, not workers employed by an industrial enterprise. And along trade-union lines it's the same thing. And we're surprised that production's in a bad way..."

The secretary looked at him thoughtfully. Adam continued without letting him speak:

"I propose we should broaden the branch organization. It should be an organization including all the workers employed by the fishing fleet. If there are too many, there should be a Party committee. And that as soon as possible."

Silence fell... A ship's siren calling for a pilot and tug-boat came from the port: ooh! ooh! A train passed somewhere near by. In the street below, under the trees with their crowns all dusty through the summer wind, somebody shouted.

"For if we consider them as belonging to the branch organization of the village they feel themselves peasants, or, at least only semi-proletarians," Adam said seeing that the secretary was thoughtful. "And we keep 'em in a backward state, hence their lack of discipline — fluctuation of man-power."

"One moment!" the secretary said. "This fluctuation, what are we going to do about it? In a year your branch organization will have fallen through. Everyone'll quit and be replaced by others."

"It'll not fall through at all," Adam said decisively, trying to appear calm although he was in a fever of anxiety, realizing that there was not far to go to win. "It'll not fall through. There's a nucleus of very decent men who consider themselves workers, and not peasants or fishermen, as in the old days. The fluctuation's much smaller than last year and it'll decrease still more, especially if there's someone to carry on political work among 'em... But not the branch organization of the countryside, for they know nothing of the problems of the fishing fleet nor have they any interest in 'em."

The secretary looked at Adam again and then said:

"There seems to be something in your proposal." At which Adam felt it hard not to show his joy — not to laugh wildly, jump and dance and shout as he would have done on the site of Eftei Danilov's house, in imagination now turned into a field, mere flat earth without a name.

He said in a cool, controlled voice:

"That's the situation, comrade secretary. And it requires such a step."

The other still thinking, murmured:

"What'll the organization bureau on board ship think of it?"

"I can tell you that," Adam said with a dry laugh. "They won't like it."

"And why not?"

"Because it'll make Party work more difficult for 'em and'll increase their responsibility."

The secretary seemed amused. Adam continued:

"But that'd be the only way to give 'em real Party responsibility — for this production of food..."

He said the last words as if they had been an after-thought with no need to lay weight on them. He knew that the Party was asking the regional committee to increase the production of foodstuffs, and he knew what the production of the fleet meant.

"Well, we'll discuss it," the secretary said.

At this Adam showed impatience for the first time:

"The longer you stay discussing the matter, the less train loads of tins there'll be..."

The secretary looked him full in the face:

"A good thing you tell me that," he said ironically, "I might not have thought of it for myself."

Going down the steps, Adam met Pricop and Preţiosu who greeted him jovially like old friends:

"Well, aren't you coming with us?" which meant: 'We're just going to slip in a word with the regional committee that'll keep you away from sea for the next ten years!'

Adam only answered:

"No. I don't think so... I should say it's hardly necessary now..."

Which answer, uttered with calm kindness and with a certain good humour, might have meant: 'I'm tired of fighting you so I've left everything as it was; just do as you will, I wash my hands of you,' or: 'I've dug your grave and it doesn't much matter who shoves you into it!' Pricop and Preţiosu laughed as if Jora had said something funny, but somehow with uncertainty. They hardly knew whether to be pleased or annoyed. Adam went out without clarifying things, while they went up the steps, though at a slower pace now.

The second secretary of the regional committee received them with friendliness. He was glad that on board that ship they defended the honour and purity of the Party ranks.

"Well, how's the work going?" he asked. "Comrade Jora was here a short while ago and told me some interesting things..." They sat in front of his desk — two heavy, awkward men. They looked at each other, then Preţiosu said:

"Oh! our work's going all right... We brought to the attention of the Party the doings of those hooligans..."

"Ah, yes! You did right, quite right!"

"... But Comrade Jora," Preţiosu went on, "didn't help us much."

"No? And why not?"

"Well, whenever we asked for his advice, for help in our work, he got out of it, leaving us to solve everything alone."

The second secretary began to laugh good-humouredly:

"Well, but did you expect him to do your work for you?" he asked in his ironic tone.

Preţiosu felt he had taken the wrong road. Pricop, seated a little in front of him, drew his foot in its heavy boot back along the carpet pressing Preţiosu's toes in warning.

"That's not what I meant," Preţiosu laughed. "I don't know how to put things... I meant rather about those manifestations. That's where he was no help to us..."

"How d'you mean?" the secretary asked, both surprised and distrustful.

"Well, he was not at the meeting," Pricop said.

"If he was not at the meeting, where was he?"

"With the fishermen at sea. He spends more of his time with the brigades than on board, with the organization..."

"Aha, I see!" the secretary said. "He talks too much with the fishermen and doesn't spend enough time at Party headquarters." And he looked at them with a twinkle in his eyes.

Preţiosu swallowed hard. Pricop came to the rescue:

"Oh, he does all right going with them, but we're the Party organization on board and not the fleet organization, so what has Comrade Jora to do with the fishermen?"

"Yes, you're right there... you're the ship's organization and not the fleet's," the secretary murmured.

Pricop controlled his surprise and uncertainty and went on:

"He took no stand against that show of hooliganism," he said. "That's the worst of it."

"But he told me he would ask for a Party inquiry," the secretary said. "I think you underrate Jora. He's

a quiet man, reserved and has little to say for himself, but a good Party militant!"

The other two were silent, at a loss what to think: 'Was Adam, too, striking at people like Nicolau and Prodan?'

Pricop wondered. 'Was he a fool? or was he spineless — just wanted to seem vigilant but not have any conflict with them?' That's how it must be. That's how it was. It's easier to take sides with the strong and to make the helpless knuckle under. 'Adam Jora too is a schemer,' Pricop was thinking with gloomy, disdainful pride. 'He'd given it up, could do nothing more. We've put him in his place. And he's surrendered — a schemer too. They are all schemers.'

✦

That evening a group of bearded fishermen and several of the younger ones that as yet wore no beards, but were all big, hulking, sunburnt fellows with complexions tanned by the sun and wind, with blue or grey eyes, and clothes faded by the sea water, asked to be received by the first secretary of the regional Party committee: they were the Communists in the fleet who had come to ask for a single Party organization. Luca Gheorghe spoke on their behalf. The first secretary summoned all the bureau members he found available at the moment and they talked to the fishermen till after midnight.

And two days before the fleet was due to leave, Preţiosu, Pricop and Prodan were summoned by the regional Party committee bureau and informed by the first secretary that the bureau proposed to have one Party organization of all the men employed by the high sea fishing fleet. Adam Jora speaking to no one stood

stiffly with his back to the window and his hands on his hips, and though Pricop looked his way he could not see him properly, his back being turned towards the light. Yet he fancied that Adam's glance had sought him.

The first secretary giving the reasons for such a decision made it plain that the bureau members had discussed the matter and had agreed upon it, and only very potent arguments could have changed things. In that event the bureau would have postponed the taking of the decision, and perhaps it would have become plain what was the drift, the aim of such a proposal, the plan of which had been most certainly devised by Adam Jora.

Preţiosu, who was the first to be asked his opinion, had looked at Pricop. The latter had nodded imperceptibly.

"I think that'd be a mistake," Preţiosu said.

"Why?" the first secretary asked.

Preţiosu began giving reasons in a confused fashion. Perspiring with nervousness and anxiety, Pricop watched the faces of the bureau members in the hope of reading something in them. But there was little he could guess of their thoughts. Only that they failed to look interested in, or convinced of, what Preţiosu was saying.

Prodan asked to take the floor and gave his immediate support to the proposal, saying it was a good one; that the fact that all fishermen would be included in one Party organization would have favourable consequences. He spoke convincingly and two or three of the bureau members smiled or nodded, giving signs of satisfaction at his arguments: it was plain that they thought alike.

When Pricop's turn came, after much feverish thinking he could find nothing better to say than: "The proposal should be studied, it should be discussed, analysed..."

"And what is production to do until then?" the second secretary asked — the man who the day before had spoken most warmly at the meeting in favour of the proposal and of food production.

"Until then we shall carry on our work among the mass of workers," Pricop said.

"But you're the branch organization on board the ship," the other said very solemnly.

Only Pricop felt the thrust, but pretended to be stupid enough not to see it.

"Well, we'll take over this task too..." he said resignedly.

"Who prevented your doing that before?" the second secretary asked ironically. "But don't you worry, Comrade, even though your organization wasn't as it should have been so far, it will be from now on. And then we'll be able to call you to account, while you yourselves'll have no excuse to answer that you're not responsible to the Party for production and for the fleet, but only for the vessel!"

Had the situation been different, Pricop would have put in with an innocent smile: "If our opinion's not taken into account we've nothing more to say." But he did not dare to do that at this meeting, and not for any reason of shame, but because he was afraid: such tricks did not work with the people here. So he kept silent.

It was decided that a meeting should be held on board with the participation of the members of the present organization and the Communist fishermen. There

was to be a report tabled by the old organization, a proposal for a change, discussions, a resolution and the election of a new bureau.

When he heard the words report, discussions, election of a new bureau, Pricop felt he was lost. He again looked at Adam and this time their eyes certainly met. And what he saw in Adam's eyes was cold, ruthless determination. And suddenly it struck him that the Party inquiry Adam had proposed might go against him and Preţiosu. He did not know what Preţiosu's past life had been, but his own...

He turned round to look at Preţiosu who was listening with a stupid air of bewilderment. As yet he had not realized what would follow.

'I shall have to speak to him seriously,' Pricop thought.

There was a loop-hole of escape, he told himself with a new spurt of energy. There were people who would go down together with him. Lae, the store-keeper, and a few others. And then the fishermen could be talked round: 'I'm one of yours, I am from Danilofca,' he would say to them. Or maybe drink would do the trick... Simion'll have to talk to them cautiously and untiringly. Yes, there was still a chance of escape. And if he got away with it, he had but one desire: to get Adam Jora alone in some quiet place: to have him in his grip and crush him as he might crush a bird or a ripe tomato. When he thought of it he clenched his fists and swallowed hard: there was so much passion in his desire.

The next day Pricop went to see his old people at Danilofca. He found Simion there. The two brothers talked things over all the evening sitting on the bench under the old nut-tree. The bitter foliage of the walnut

was warm with the day's sun. Around the two men there were ripe nuts which had fallen from the tree. Far away on the salt-water lake a fishing-boat floated smoothly, scarcely seen on the blue mirror of the water which reflected it with its triangular yellow-grey sail.

"I'm worried, Simion," Pricop said. "It might go very hard with us. I've my reliable men, of course, and at the meeting I'll try to turn things in my favour. But if it doesn't work, it'll go hard with us."

"What could happen to you?" Simion asked suddenly.

Pricop looked silently into the distance where the deep blue water of the sea tossed and fretted as it does at the end of the summer, and Simion murmured:

"Whatever happens... He'll die by this hand of mine. D'ye hear? I swear it: he'll die by this hand. And he won't have to wait long. It'll be soon."

Simion had spoken calmly and in a low voice so that only Pricop should hear. All around was silence — silence and heat. The lake had turned a yellow green with the setting sun. The fragrance of the warm nut leaves pervaded the air. A walnut fell to the ground.

"Soon," Simion murmured. "I must only find the moment."

XXXIX

Although Pricop was trembling with strain and worry, one could not have said that anything was amiss with him: the only change was a more smiling face, a more kindly, less stony manner and an unusual loquacity. When he thought of the coming Party meeting and its possible consequences, and there were people

about, he would suddenly become more talkative and even facetious. He was like a soldier who, in those tense moments before an attack, jokes and laughs nervously and becomes senselessly voluble — the result of the emotion within him. Watching Lae, the store-keeper, and those other friends of his and Preţiosu's, Pricop would note how they talked in low voices with some of the sailors and factory workers, stopping their talk or changing the subject of their conversation when Nicolau, the boatswain or Prodan passed by.

Pricop saw all this without showing he had seen as he went on with his work. He knew what Lae said: "Look here, we must be careful. The Party trusts Preţiosu and Pricop. They're old partisans of theirs, tested in work. This instructor is just a swollen-headed pup who wants to change them without consulting others — which the Party won't want. The whole thing will fall upon the one who's schemed it..." And when Simion came on board with the fish, he would walk upon the upper deck for a few minutes, and then Pricop would come up as if by chance, and they would exchange a few words with that indifferent, sullen air that they had both inherited from their father, Eftei Danilov.

"I've spoken to 'em," Simion would say. "I told 'em you were a decent chap, a man who knew life and came from the same village as themselves..."

"Did you say that to the Danilofca people, you fool?" Pricop inquired angrily between his teeth.

Simion however was unperturbed.

"Fool, of course! You're the brains of the family. No, I can't say much to the Danilofca people. They don't like us, the churls, damned good-for-nothings... I've spoken more with the people of Sulina, because I

know they're always ready to have a fight with our people and Sfîntu-Gheorghe's..."

Pricop went away without answering. They had been seen talking too long. Most of the Communist fishermen were from Danilofca, the men Simion was not favoured by... 'However, you can't have everyone siding with you; in a struggle there must be some on the other side as well,' so Pricop told himself to steady his nerves. At night time he met Preţiosu, and talked things over with him again and again. And they called in Lae, too. Never had Preţiosu seemed more stupid to him. And as to Lae, he was beginning to fear him; he was becoming insolent, started tapping him on the shoulder, offering him sympathy:

"Don't worry, Pricop," he would say, "we'll teach 'em... But tell me who do ye think would do as a substitute for Prodan in the organization bureau? Who?"

Finally there came a fishing smack under the supervision of Spiru Vasiliu with goods for the factory. Vasiliu's face was drawn, his eyes sunken, and he spoke with a nervous, sickly mirth. Adam Jora, too, came on board with an envoy of the regional Party committee, and the two immediately closeted themselves with Preţiosu, talking with him for a couple of hours. It was assumed they were preparing the organization of the meeting. Pricop and Prodan were also expecting to be summoned. But in the meantime Pricop walked on the sea-splashed upper deck — the iron flooring had been freshly washed with the hose — feeling that he could no longer support the strain. A few fishermen had returned from the brigades and stood around Emelian Romanov who was doing most of the talking. Now and again they would burst out into gruff, thundering guffaws. Pricop forced

a smile and drew near. Emelian had taken Iermolai to book for the thousandth time and was shouting at him:

"What? D'ye think I don't know ye? Ye're from Periprava. Brothers and Comrades, d'ye know the kind of village Periprava is, and the kind of men that live there? A grand place and grand people! That's all I can tell ye: grand! Now what's a village got in the middle of it?"

The men standing by looked at one another and one of them said:

"The people's council," while another added: "The branch organization."

Yet another murmured:

"The church..."

"In the old days it was the pub," Iermolai said faintly.

"You keep quiet, for you're from Periprava."

"I certainly ain't, " Iermolai protested with some embarrassment.

"Oh, yes, ye are. Well, in their village, Comrades, ye'll find in the very middle of it neither the people's council, nor the Party headquarters nor anything like that. Ye'll find a merry-go-round — a merry-go-round like we see at the fair. That's how it is in yer village, Iermolai, and shame on ye for it. And that's why ye're what ye are, me lad."

"It's not like it at all," Iermolai objected though without heat. "And you're a liar. As if you didn't know I come from Danilofca just as you do."

"Aha! So ye're from Danilofca, are ye? All right. Ye know the story of the bell then."

"Of course, I do," Iermolai said, becoming still more confused.

"Tell it then."

"Not me!" said Iermolai.

Emelian looked round triumphantly and said:

"Ye won't, won't ye? and that's because ye don't know it. Now deny ye're from Periprava. Well, *I'll* tell ye the story, me hearties. When the Germans came in 1916, they wanted to take down our church bells and melt 'em. But the people of Danilofca said: 'No, the big bell was presented to us by general...' What's his name? You know, the Russian general who took Ismail from the Turks. Or maybe it was Katherine, the tsarina. I don't rightly know. Anyhow, good luck to whoever it was if he's not dead yet. 'Well, that bell, we won't give. But what are we to do with it? We'll take it and sink it in the lake and when the Germans are gone we'll take it out again.' "

One of the listeners interposed here:

"Nothing but a liar ye are!"

"And who was to sink it?" Emelian went on, without minding the interruption. "Iermolai, the high sea fisherman."

"But he was from Periprava, ye said just now, " one of the listeners put in. "And how old was he in 1916? Why, he was only a kid!"

"I told ye he lied. Now see for yourselves," Iermolai said, calling upon them to witness.

"A high sea fisherman he was. He took the bell, went right to the middle of the lake and threw it in. And he chalked the side of his boat. 'That's where I sunk it,' he says, 'and that's where we must look for it...' Then when the time came, they all went, with Iermolai leading 'em, to look for the bell by the sign he'd made on the side of the boat. But they couldn't find it, Brothers and Comrades. Now what d'ye say, Iermolai, to that? Maybe someone had stolen it?"

Most of the men around were laughing, though some of them were indignant.

One said: "Ye speak of us, men of Danilofca, as though ye weren't one yerself. And as if we were all a set of mugs. One of these days, Uncle Emelian, ye'll get what ye didn't ask for, and such as yer wife has never given ye yet!"

To which Emelian responded jovially:

"No, we've no mugs in our village, thank God! The folk of Danilofca are a clever lot and comrade chairman who stands here and has a laugh with us is proof of it. Say, Iermolai, did ye ever expect to see Comrade Pricop a big'un in the Party and in the trade union? Knowing his father, old Eftei, it was hardly to be expected, was it?... But he's a clever'un and mighty now..."

Pricop turned his stony face towards Emelian and smiled graciously.

"Now, now, Emelian, that tongue of yours... You know how to get at everyone. But, Comrades, Emelian's a good chap. And a high sea fisherman such as you rarely find."

Emelian gave an embarrassed laugh, then frowned. This unexpected flattery had clipped his wings. He both liked and disliked it; in any case it perplexed him. What was he to answer? And still Pricop was speaking in that gracious tone of his.

"Yes, yes, Comrades...I know every one of you and I understand him. Yes, I can't help it. That's how I am..."

The fishermen twisted their mouths into a grin as one does when one has to smile at a joke out of politeness. Pricop still remaining with them, silence fell upon them until one of them said:

"Emelian, I've something to tell you." And he took Emelian by the shoulder and went away. The others dispersed gradually, and Pricop was left alone.

XL

Adam had not plotted or schemed. He had merely done what the irrigation engineers do when they come across a swampy land with putrid, stagnant waters: and that is to make an outlet, divert a river with clean swift waters right through the swamp, and the living waters sweep away the rottenness of the swamp and the land is left clean and fertile, ready to receive the seed and bear fruit. Hatred and revolt against injustice and a great fear of failure had stirred him, and made him think about things for long. Finally he had found a solution. Where could he find fresh energies, he had asked himself — men untainted by rottenness, not tired by barren struggle? Among the fishermen. He would induce them to draw the others on board into a new healthy movement.

And now here they were in the eating-room of the second deck, under the upper deck of the *October Star*, seated on benches near the ship's crew — helmsmen, mechanics, stokers and the rest — together with the women of the factory. They sat in clothes faded by the sun, drenched by sea water, stained with the blood of the big cod: fishermen with fair beards, tousled hair, clear-cut features, broad brows, firm lips and blue or green eyes like the open sea, their faces weather-beaten, the skin on the temples and around the eyes lined with scanning the distance, and their hands swollen and calloused by rowing and drawing in the fishing-

line. Adam was seated at the table spread with the red cloth, and, his eyes on them, he waited for them to speak.

Preţiosu had read his report, which said that "the branch organization had not done enough to gear the fishermen's enthusiasm," that "the organization" had shown shortcomings in its work with the youth, that *this* was wrong with the organization and *that* was wrong with it. Plenty of criticism applied to the organization but not to himself or to Pricop. Besides "they had also had successes." The "commandeering spirit of certain comrades such as Nicolau and the boatswain had been fought down." And "the anti-Party attitude of Prodan and of Comrade Mitea had been exposed."

The delegate of the regional committee had taken notes. Adam was waiting. He felt the presence of Preţiosu and of Pricop about him. He did not need to look at them. Their elbows almost touched. He would have liked to draw back his elbow and his chair. It would have been easier for him to sit by a rotten carcass in the fields for all its pestilential stink than to sit by them. However, he could neither voice his feelings nor show them in any way, so he waited.

Several people put up their hands to ask for the floor. The first to do this was Comrade Mitea who was in charge of the factory. She had arranged her headkerchief satisfactorily and risen to speak. What did Preţiosu think? she asked. What? Who was he trying to fool? What was the "organization"? And who was responsible for its poor work? Had they, the members of the organization, bound their — Preţiosu's and Pricop's — hands to prevent them from working? Hadn't they — the workers — carried out their tasks? Was it because there were comrades from ashore at

the meeting, comrades who didn't know how things stood, that they dared to lie to them and try to get away with it? And then didn't the organization know how it had been when she'd said that the Party and the trade-union organizations on board ship had hampered work; and he himself had pretended to misunderstand her, pretended she meant the Party, and had put her in the wrong? She would now speak out for all to know.

She unburdened her heart, and then Nicolau went to it, followed by Prodan who said what he knew of the discussions of the bureau of the Party branch.

"Not for a single moment did we think of the fact that this fleet was taking ashore food for the people," he began. "The miners and the men in the factories eat what the fishermen bring to the ship. But we never discussed the question in the organization bureau. We only spoke about how to put one or the other in his place, and how to appear blameless before the Party. Hypocrisy, that's what it all was. We talked of principles and did the dirty."

He criticized himself passionately like a man who had gone through a great deal and had been silent for too long. There was silence except for the whirr of the ventilators; and all listened breathelessly, their eyes fastened on Preţiosu and Pricop. The latter looked into vacancy. Suddenly Pricop seemed to awake and shot a quick glance at Lae. The latter asked for the floor and began to speak loudly:

"Comrades, what's been said is not correct. Some of the folks here want to get at Comrades Preţiosu and Pricop and be revenged because they've been criticized by them; Comrade Prodan had better say how he was engineering a Party meeting when he was painting the starboard. Let him tell us about that."

They all turned to look at Prodan. The latter flushed just as he had done the first time and answered:

"I can tell you every word I said then."

"Don't, for we know about it already," one of the men mumbled — it was the store-keeper but, as he was of small build, he could not be seen.

Others had begun to speak. Now and again Pricop's men jumped up to take the floor, attacking desperately. The regional committee delegate whispered into Adam's ear:

"I don't like it, Brother. There's something wrong here..."

Adam nodded but did not answer. Luca Gheorghe had asked to take the floor. He stood, fumbling with his cap helplessly, a fair-haired man with a nose reddened by the sun, and eyes like two drops of ice in his bearded weather-beaten face, and short hair like a yellow brush.

"Comrades," he said, "I don't like what I've heard. It seems to me these comrades wanted to act like tyrants here, like the cod when it runs into a shoal of herrings and swallows them three at a time. And the others were too soft. Why don't they tell the Party more? Why don't they say everything?"

He stood thinking for a while, frowning and then went on: "The only thing they cared about was to talk big. To pour out grand words. Did the trade union know that Emelian Romanov had purposely been deprived of a man with the express intention that he should bring in less fish? Does the trade union know that we haven't any hurricane lamps for bad weather and can drown like rats in the dark? Why did Matvei Chirsanov and his mates get drowned? Because he had no lamp, because all Preţiosu wants to know about is the organization on board ship, and because all he cares about is

to hold meetings instead of checking the men's work, and seeing how it goes with them and whether they have what they need. Another'll drown tomorrow. D'ye hear, Preţiosu? You drowned Matvei Chirsanov. You and your Pricop ! You drowned those men, and you'll drown others too if we let you."

He had spoken emphatically withal that he found his words with difficulty, and left long pauses. The men's faces had darkened as they listened to him speaking unhappily and frowning, but striking ruthlessly at the two he was attacking. When he resumed his seat, the atmosphere seemed changed. The tension had relaxed, there was no longer any uncertainty and irritated silence. They felt that things had come to a head. A few fishermen then got up to speak, and one or two others of the ship's crew, engine mechanics and so on.

Small, grey-haired Marinică, the boatswain, also asked for the floor:

"No one can do any criticizing here," he said; "for, if you say anything against Preţiosu and Pricop, the next day you're served last with your ration, or Pricop summons you and threatens to make things nasty for you because you have a commanding attitude towards the men."

"Or because your work isn't up to standard !" another voice shouted from the far end of the room.

"Even now," Marinică went on, "Lae and the storekeeper have been walking the deck talking to the men and trying to win them over to keep their mouths shut."

"Me?" Lae cried out. "Me? Who says I've been talking to them about anything?"

A voice at the far end of the room remarked:

"No ! ye haven't said anything, I don't think !"

The boatswain turned round towards Lae:

"You haven't said anything directly, perhaps, but everybody's understood what you were driving at. You think you're cleverer than the others... and that's a mistake..."

Preţiosu's face had darkened, turning an ugly green. He'd had enough. He asked to be allowed to take the floor. Then, in a loud voice, he began:

"Many of the men here speak about my mistakes. But when Comrade Nicolau shouts and bullies the sailors, who stands up for them? Me. And have you nothing to say against him? Have you nothing to say against the captain, when he was unable to rally the fishermen to their work, and they lay all fuddled and vomiting on the upper deck like swine? Hang it all!... Look at 'em now!"

The fishermen were murmuring in gruff, hurt tones. The last words of Preţiosu's who had sat down all atremble, had angered them. Nicolau had grown pale and wanted to answer but he hadn't the chance. Prodan rose and said:

"Comrade Nicolau has been criticized. But it wasn't his shouting — you'll excuse my calling it so, comrade mate — it wasn't his shouting that impeded production. And as to letting the men get drunk, why, it was decided, only a few days ago, that not more than a hundred grammes of drink should be given with every midday meal! But who ordered the store-room to be always open? Pricop. That's the way he understands trade-union work. Though it's true that some of the fishermen drink too much, which is nothing to be proud of."

"Oh, ain't it? If we can drink and carry on with our work, that means we can stand it!" a voice at the far end of the room shouted. A mechanic with a deep scar over his temple turned that way:

"You keep your mouth shut, Stelian!"

Prodan went on with a touch of emotion:

"Comrade Captain strove to convince the men to go out fishing. I can testify to that. But what did we, the Party organization, do? What did the trade union do? Nothing. And that's a fact."

He sat down wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He was not used to speaking so much. From among the press of men in front a bearded fisherman put up his hand and rose heavily to his feet:

"I've got a question to ask. Who proposed Pricop Danilov as trade-union chairman?"

Pricop stared at him fascinated. Prodan said in a loud, disgusted voice:

"We, the organization bureau."

"Yes, and who proposed he should be in the organization bureau?"

"Preţiosu," the mechanic with the scar said. "I remember it was Preţiosu who proposed him."

Prodan added:

"And he nominated him as chairman."

The boatswain spoke as if to himself from where he sat on the bench:

"But, as a matter of fact, it was Pricop who made Preţiosu do the dirty work..."

"How did he make me?" Preţiosu jumped up, trembling with fury. He had to try to save Pricop to save himself.

"Tell us how, Comrade Pricop!" one of the men jeered.

The mechanic with the scar over the temple spoke roughly:

"Why call him 'Comrade Pricop'? You needn't call him anything but 'Pricop.' Let Pricop speak."

"I don't remember," Pricop murmured, "that is... I don't understand..."

Preţiosu turned round and looked at him. For the first time that evening he realized that Pricop was under a greater strain than himself. His face had an ashen colour and he was perspiring freely. The delegate who was sitting by him was writing something. And on the other side, on Preţiosu's left, that cursed Adam Jora seemed to have grown bigger. The dog! As if all this had been a health-giving drug to him, or as if he had heard who knows what good news. He looked rested, wide awake, pleased. But Pricop... Pricop... What was the matter with him? Why was he so afraid? His fear troubled Preţiosu who shot another passing look at him.

"What is it you want to ask? Are ye scheming something again?" the voice at the end of the hall asked ironically.

Preţiosu quickly turned his head from Pricop — afraid lest it look as though he was seeking advice from him. The thought 'I must criticize myself' shot through his brain. He must ward off the peril, he must be humble. 'There's danger ahead, my lad — ruin awaiting you!' he was telling himself.

"Does anyone else want to speak?" he asked in a hoarse voice.

No. Nearly everybody had taken the floor.

"Perhaps you have something to say yourself," the delegate said coldly, looking up from his papers.

Preţiosu rose mechanically and began speaking again. He didn't really know what he said. He had wanted to speak about his past life, about the struggle of the working class, but what had he to say about more recent times?

"...I was mistaken, Comrades... I was mistaken..." He was perspiring freely and he spoke brokenly: "I allowed myself to be driven into... making mistakes..."

"Who drove you?" Adam Jora asked cuttingly.

Preţiosu's face took on a greener hue and he turned towards Pricop with an awkward movement. When he met his gaze — his grey expressionless eyes — he shifted his look. The cutting voice asked again:

"Who drove you?"

Preţiosu pointed sideways with a hesitant movement of his hand:

"He did..."

"Who? Pricop?"

"Yes..." Preţiosu sighed and resumed his seat.

"Have you nothing more to say?" the delegate asked.

Preţiosu only shrugged his shoulders. The delegate of the regional committee turned towards Pricop:

"And you?"

"I, Comrades," Pricop said rising, "I, Comrades, have served the people..." and his open hand struck lightly against his heart. "Let those who've got anything against me speak out. Let them say if I haven't had a correct attitude, Comrades, and I ask this in all sincerity. Let those comrades who criticize me think things over, let them think about their injustice towards me." He spoke warmly, and seemed moved and without rancour.

The cook had softened. She said to Marinică, the boatswain:

"He's not a bad man, really."

The boatswain shrugged his shoulders and murmured:

"Your brains have gone soft...They don't work..."

Pricop was saying:

"I was wrong not to have criticized Preţiosu, not to have shown him his mistakes... I encouraged him... Comrades, that's true. I am to blame and you're right to criticize me."

There was one strange thing about it all: he seemed to feel relieved, to feel glad to be able to accuse himself in this way. The men in the hall had become quiet. Preţiosu was wiping the sweat from his face, while Pricop went on speaking, admitting his guilt, criticizing himself...

Adam alone had looked up and now stared at Pricop with a far-away look. He was thinking strenuously. Suddenly he laughed, his daring, irritating laughter, the laughter of the old days when he was a restive, querulous youngster, and he asked:

"Have you done?"

"There is something else..." Pricop murmured.

"Anything new? Something concrete?"

Pricop hesitated for a couple of seconds. Adam turned towards the men and asked:

"Comrades, are you satisfied with this self-criticism?"

At first nobody answered. They'd had enough. Pricop's speech had tired and wearied them. And they didn't know what to say. Pricop had criticized himself, that was sure... though Marinică, the boatswain, said as if speaking to himself:

"The fact is he hasn't said anything..."

But Adam Jora had not wearied. He had only just begun to listen with real attention. Theirs would be the last clash! Pricop was to be routed out of his last hiding place. That was why he had calmed down. He knew more than they...

"Comrades," Adam asked, "have we thought of everything Pricop has done on this ship? He's been a

demagogue with the fishermen. He's opened the storeroom for them, he's encouraged indiscipline and anarchy. Is that right?"

The men looked at one another: it was right.

"He's neglected his duty as regards the emulation drive. He's induced the fishermen to stay on board for days and weeks. He's put the brakes on production. A particle of the plan was in his hands and he's mishandled it as best he could!"

Suddenly the fatigue in the men's eyes was gone. They were attentive again, wide awake. Pricop's face had changed. He spoke:

"Comrades... I didn't know what I was doing... I didn't mean..."

It was then that Adam Jora rose and struck the table with his fist:

"Anyone can say 'I didn't mean!' D'you understand what Pricop's done? D'you think it's nothing? D'you think that he merely let things slide and wanted to get round the men for nothing? He's done more than that. Don't you understand?"

He was asking his questions passionately. He had stirred them. Pricop jumped to his feet:

"Comrades! I've never thought of it! Comrade Jora'll make me out next to be a man of the imperialists ...of the millionaires! I'm a seaman and I've lived on a wage throughout my life!"

He was terribly frightened. The men were wavering. Marinică, the boatswain, rose and spoke calmly:

"Comrade Jora, we won't say he's an enemy. Maybe he means no harm in his heart..."

At that moment Adam Jora remembered things he couldn't have spoken about to anyone. He remembered the prison, the horrible stink in his cell, the bugs; he

remembered a dusty afternoon and the shade of the acacia-trees over the tumbledown hut out of whose windows convolvuluses had grown, the hut with nettles growing from the floor...'Old Acsinia? She's dead. And her son died in prison.'

A tall fisherman with a pointed beard such as one sees in old pictures, rose and spoke in a voice that seemed to come out of the bottom of a cask:

"Pricop's brother, Simion Danilov, has gone about asking the people of the different brigades not to attack Pricop at this meeting. D'ye know anything about that, Pricop?"

"No ! Nothing !" Pricop shouted. He was so agitated that, as he rose, he pulled at his shirt as if he wanted to bare his breast. "Comrades, believe me ! I... my heart..."

"Facts," the regional committee delegate said coldly. "Give us facts."

Adam breathed hard. He covered his face with his hands and sat like that, resting his elbows on the table. 'Old Acsinia? She's dead...' a child had told him. And Uliana: 'I can't bear it any longer, Adam... I can't bear it...'

When he had become calmer, he took his hands from his eyes. Nominations for the new organization bureau were being made. Luca Gheorghe. Nobody objected. Prodan. A fisherman and an engine mechanic rose to ask why Prodan hadn't spoken earlier. Marinică, the boatswain, was proposed instead. Lae, whom stupidity made shameless and fearless, rose to say that it was impossible to elect him. Marinică, however, was elected. Then the woman in charge of the factory and Nicolau, and yet another fisherman, one of Romanov's brigade.

As the meeting was being concluded, the delegate of the regional Party committee wrote on a slip of paper for Adam to see:

"Cadres inquiry into Danilov and Preţiosu's case. What do you say to that?"

Adam murmured:

"I told the comrade secretary an inquiry would be necessary..."

Then, he leant back in his chair, drew in the air deeply and exhaled well and long.

XLI

Pricop had gone out with trembling limbs, and walked with a stumbling gait as if he had grown ten years older since the beginning of the meeting. He climbed to the deck, taking one step at a time. Behind him he heard someone breathing hard. He knew it was Preţiosu. The two came out upon the upper deck, passed among the groups of fishermen who were talking together in the dark and found themselves alone on the cabin deck. Pricop felt very tired yet he knew he would not be able to sleep; that he would have to think of the dangers threatening him, of a future that held many traps in store for him, of his defence. He knew he would find no way of settling his problems, no loop-hole by which he might escape retribution, for the meeting had brought confusion to his head. And yet, he would have to worry all through the night. And he was alone. Not as in former days when he had had friends. Today he had none; indeed it was many years since he had had any. He had grown old, had become cunning and dangerous. Too

many people had deceived him, and he had deceived too many to be able to put his trust in anyone.

Now he was ready to drop even Preţiosu, the only man with whom he could make plans, share an interest — have anything in common. The only man he had spoken to more than to the others, whom he had made dizzy with words, with thoughts more daring than such a man could devise. And now... he had proved to be merely a worm, a coward and an idiot. Pricop drew away from Preţiosu, hugging the wall so as not to touch him, and disappeared in the shadow of the deck.

Preţiosu watched him as he went, uncertain whether to follow him or not. He decided not to. It was too dangerous. He went and locked himself up in his cabin — to drink.

They all knew that a cadres inquiry would be made into Pricop's and Preţiosu's case. Nobody had actually said such an inquiry would be made, but everyone thought there surely would be one. Nobody spoke to Pricop. Not that they were shy of him now; they spoke about him and Preţiosu in their presence as if they did not exist.

One day, the chief engineer was relating something to a group of sailors and fishermen. They were on the lee-side of the cabin deck to the starboard. From the engine room below, where the mechanics, naked to their waists and streaming with sweat showed muscles hard as stone, gusts of hot air mixed with the smell of oil floated upwards. Pricop was leaning against the wall of a cabin listening. Preţiosu came up a little later. But imperceptibly their numbers were becoming less. The men were drifting away. Preţiosu understood and withdrew quietly. Pricop, however, stood his ground among the remaining few — although they showed little inclination for his company — and continued to listen with a

smile in which there was both insolence and embarrassment.

The chief engineer, however, did not look at him. He was looking at the purple sea in the distance. Patches of silver like big moving mirrors stretched over the water up to the brilliant edge of the horizon, with lilac-coloured vapour floating above it. The sea was clear and quiet, the sky mellow, the twilight velvety as never before. And the silence was hardly broken by the swell of the waves. For a space the breath of a dolphin was heard, then again there was boundless peace in the air and over the water.

"I was sick and tired of playing fair," the chief engineer was saying with his disappointed, philosophical smile. "So I thought things over, weighed 'em up, and what did I say to myself? 'Young man, from now on ye're taking to piracy. Ye're going to turn into a swine. And we'll see how that works.' And so I became one. You laugh like the fools ye are. D'ye think it showed on my face? Not a bit of it. The folks who were straight had no inkling of it. But a middleman, the trusty of the company, smelt something. You see, he recognized his like. To this day though, I can't understand how he found me out. And I hadn't done anything. I'd only come to a decision, but a terrible one. You see, I was fed up with living rough, with poverty, and being the door-mat of the Socony Company. I could have stolen, committed murder, if necessary. Or at least that's what I thought. He, as a middleman, guessed my thoughts. We were in Istambul unloading oil brought from Constantza. We met in a pub — by chance it seemed. He took me aside and said:

" 'Kirie,' he said, — that is Mr. — 'Kirie, d'you want to do some business?' To which I answered:

'I'm game. D'ye want me to kill anyone?' He began to laugh: 'Aferim, aferim!' — meaning that's right! — 'I like resolute people. No, it's something much easier, much easier . . . just to sink the damned *Arabella Robertson.*'

" 'Oh!' I thought, 'that's what it is: to sink the *Arabella Robertson*!' I was all out for plunder, even murder, yet when I heard that I went pale. I was sorry: for years I'd sailed on the *Arabella* and I was fond of her. The middleman narrowed his eyes and spoke to me sharply though in a whisper: 'A thousand dollars, man!'

" I was sorry for the ship. But don't judge her by the name. And don't run away with the idea that it was a lovely white sailing ship with tall masts that glided a little aslant before the wind like a dream boat, like a young gal of 18. No, lads, it was an ugly, old black oil tanker with its paint peeling off, a worn-out engine and shaky rivets... And on the wall of the crew's quarters there was a little medicine chest with a tiny packet for everyone, containing poison — potassium cyanide — which, to prevent our being burnt alive, was to be taken if the poor old girl caught fire. For if a tanker catches fire you can't get away even by trying to swim: the oil or gasoline follows you on the sea and wraps you in flames... Yes, that's silenced you, hasn't it? But, lads, that's what our life was. You'd have found that stuff on all the tankers in those days... And yet I was sorry to sink the *Arabella Robertson.* I'd been with her a long time and there were lots of decent chaps on her too, all risking their lives for a pittance... and what fault had one to find with her? She had been built in a Liverpool ship-yard in 1905 — a fine, neat little craft, and a Mr. Robertson had bought her; he had ten tankers, all christened after his family: *Thomas Robertson, Emily*

Robertson, Samuel Robertson, Nathaniel Robertson and the devil knows what other Robertsons, and this one was the *Arabella Robertson.* Then the Socony Company made things hard for Robertson, taking his customers and in the end bought the ships, rather cheap I imagine. The names remained the same, though the British flag was replaced by the stars and stripes. And ever since she'd been carrying crude oil, motor oil, gasoline and kerosene all the way from Shanghai to Vera Cruz. I said to the middleman:

" 'Kirie Papazoglu, my conscience won't let me.'

"And he said to me:

" 'Sictir ! What's a conscience? There's a thousand five hundred dollars in this.'

" 'Kirie Papazoglu,' I said, 'my heart aches for the *Arabella Robertson...*'

" 'Mine too,' he said. 'And the company's. But she's insured and for much more than she's worth. If you sink her and do the thing well, you get two thousand dollars in gold !'

"What could I say? It was winter. I bought three dynamite cartridges from some drunken captain of a British cargo-boat and, when the *Arabella Robertson* left with empty tanks to take in motor oil at Constantza, I thought:

" 'Once when I'm down at the engines — I was third officer at the time — I'll pull the electric wires and put the dynamite in the right place... Nobody'll know — only myself and one of the oilers, a real bad'un, a Lipovan of your parts — Danilofca or Jurilofca... Don't ask me now what his name is — I've forgotten...

"But I couldn't make up my mind. I thought we might all blow up. And d'you think the company and Papazoglu would have minded? Not they. They'd have

been glad. They'd have cashed the insurance money without any trouble, inquiry, witnesses or anything. And then I was sorry for the ship, and for the boys who worked and slept on her without an inkling of what was in store for them... And the weather was foul; it was cold and windy and there were big waves... This sea which is now like a bowl of milk had begun to frown, had roused itself it seemed, but as if you didn't know yourselves what it's like in winter.

"When we were nearing Constantza, I thought I'd better get the job done. The barometer was going down showing bad weather but there was nothing for it. I couldn't wait till we were loaded for we'd all have been burnt to death.

So one night when the *Arabella Robertson* was creaking her way up and down the waves, and there was no one about but my bandit of an oiler, I used my explosive. There was a terrific bang which shook the old girl pretty badly and then another explosion. I stopped the engines for the shock had broken the screws, and began rousing the men.

" 'Hi, boys, into the boats! We're in for it! She'll sink!'

"Some of 'em wanted to bring along their things — the little money they'd saved, clothes, boxes, anything... But I didn't let 'em...

" 'Jump for it, my lads, or you'll soon need nothing at all.'

"They were all running about on the upper deck with the wind blowing and this perverse sea roaring. And the prow of the *Arabella Robertson* was beginning to dip — her helm and broken screws showing only now and again. The captain — an Englishman — was drunk; the mate by the way was Spiru Vasiliu, the man we

have at the trust now; the other officers were Dutch and the rest of the crew made up of Maltese, Algerians, two Swedes and us two Rumanians. The drunken captain was tearing his hair out:

" 'What's she run into? There are no rocks on the chart. This'll do for me. Nobody'll give me another boat and I shall die in the gutter.'

" 'She's not run into anything,' I told him. 'She's just broken her back with old age. The rivets have gone and she'll have to be abandoned. Come on, to the boats! Quick!'

"Tossed by the waves the boats threatened to strike against the poop and smash the men to pulp. I waited for a moment and then I ran and fired the third dynamite cartridge... Boom! That's all the *Arabella*, poor thing, was waiting for. She shook again and keeled over. When I got on deck it was wet and all aslant like a house-top and I could see nothing but darkness and the water which was striking against the boat and sweeping over the deck. The boats were nowhere. I climbed to the larboard and could make out the boats some three or four hundred yards away. They all thought I was in someone else's boat and so they were leaving.

"The *Arabella Robertson* was trembling under my feet. Tons of water were sweeping over her every second. I was roaring hoarsely though I don't even know now whether any sound came from my throat. I was deadly cold, my jaws all stiff. And there I stood trembling and waiting for the poor *Arabella Robertson* to go down. There'd be a terrible swirl, a funnel which would have sucked me down too.

"It was then that a third boat came round the poop to the larboard on the lee-side. I hadn't seen it; I thought they'd all left. They, too, thought I was in one of the

other boats. And they were pulling away for all they were worth to get clear of the sinking boat. I jumped into the sea — it was December — and swam as if I'd been out for the world championship. They hauled me into the boat, gave me other clothes — those I didn't want the chaps to take with them — and for two days we were tossed on the open sea. Finally we were thrown up on the Turkish coast, after being very nearly drowned in a few feet of water off the shore by those big coastal waves... Then there was the inquiry at Istambul, and investigations by the agents of the insurance company. I myself was down with pneumonia. But finally there was an end of it all. Everybody had been bribed by the Socony. The insurance company paid up and everything went fine. Turkish fashion. I was pale and weak when I went to Papazoglu. He was in a great hurry:

" 'Ah,' he said to me. 'How are you, young man? Come and see me tomorrow.'

" 'What d'you mean tomorrow?' I said. 'Give me those two thousand dollars in gold. Hell and damnation! Haven't I sunk the *Arabella Robertson*? Haven't I been within an inch of death? What I've gone through not even two million'd pay for! How'd you like to have been on the *Arabella Robertson* at forty-five degrees, her prow in the water and the boats already away? Come on, hand over the money!'

" 'Young man,' Kir Papazoglu said to me, 'the *Arabella Robertson* sank because she was old, as has been made plain at the inquiry. You yourself made a statement to that effect.'

" 'What!' I shouted at him. 'D'you mean to say you haven't tricked the insurance company? And what about the Socony? Do you want to make out that you didn't speak to me on behalf of the company?'

"He appeared nervous at this, closed the office door — it was a glass-door through which a shoe-black could be seen reading the paper outside — and looked at me like a gentleman that you offer a glass of ratsbane to.

" 'Listen to me,' he said. 'Don't bring a limited company, which doesn't know of your existence, into this affair. Who's the Socony? Have you spoken to it? What's it like? You see, you're just a fool. Ha, ha, haw, haw! and now away with you, or I'll call the police.'

"A film came over my eyes and I took him by the throat:

" 'Kir Papazoglu, I've deadened my conscience and risked my life for this affair of yours. At this moment my heart's a pigsty, and I very nearly lost my life. Either you pay me the money or I'll kill you here on the spot. I don't care a damn what'll happen to me.'

"Papazoglu paled:

" 'Dear friend, don't be a fool,' he said. 'I joked, my dear lad... Only I didn't expect your visit and I haven't got the two thousand. But here's what I have... Business is so bad...'

" 'How much did the Socony give you? Ten thousand? Twenty thousand? And how much did they get? A hundred thousand?'

" 'Don't you believe it! You forget the costs, dear boy, the attorneys and lawyers, the police and the newspapers... A loss, my friend, a sheer loss. Everybody's lost by it... But as you say you've been in danger, see, I'm taking from my own money, I swear by my children! I wanted to buy new clothes for them, poor things! This is all I have, but what it is, I give it you whole-heartedly.'

"He gave me two hundred dollars, and I blued the lot that night and then looked for another ship...

But the best bit was about the oiler. He came to me and said:

" 'Come on, hand over a thousand.'

" 'But,' I said, 'I promised you a hundred.'

" 'To hell with your promise, give me a thousand or I'll spill the beans.'

" 'Go to Papazoglu, he owes me another one thousand eight hundred,' I said.

" 'No,' my oiler said sticking out his chin. 'Not me! Or rather we'll go together for I know you for the pirate you are!' D'ye hear that: me — a pirate! And I'd just been shown how good I was at the job!

" 'All right,' I said, 'let's go together.' The drink had given me a headache and I wanted some amusement to put me right again. Well, Papazoglu got rid of him and fifty dollars. I won't tell you how he did it, how he coaxed him, and the fine words he said to get round him! I stood by and listened, and laughed and groaned in turn. When I laughed my brains shook and my head ached something fearful..."

The chief engineer smiled his disappointed, kindly smile. The men were silent, the mechanic with the deep scar on his temple gave a chuckle:

"Well, a sailor's job's a hard one... It won't let ye turn thief. Being a sailor and running amuck don't go together...When ye're at sea all yer life, yer heart changes too...Either ye become a real man, or ye remain ashore."

"Uncle Hell," young Constantin asked. "And did you give up being a pirate after that?"

"I gave it up, my poppet. I wasn't made for it. It requires certain qualities. I thought it better to confine myself to my job and I've amassed a fortune as you see: the clothes I wear. Twit, twit, twit!"

Night had fallen. The lilac-coloured vapours in the distance had grown grey, with long, purple streaks. And the water, too, was like a purple mirror. The air was warm and soft and motionless. A vessel with a slender, elegant silhouette, was rounding the poop of the *October Star* and trying to come up alongside.

"The *Filimon Sîrbu*'s brought the tins!" Nicolau shouted from the bridge, and all rushed over to the starboard rail to see the fishing smack leisurely drawing near the bigger vessel and sailors of the *Filimon Sîrbu* throwing the line that carried the ropes to the *October Star* to which the fishing smack was made fast. The winches on the forecastle deck had begun to rumble, and the fishermen on the smack were lowering on to the deck crates of shining empty tins. Constantin turned on the searchlight to the starboard and his voice could be heard giving orders.

The chief engineer sat on a bitt looking at the deserted horizon. There was but one man left now from among his listeners, and that was Pricop who stood with his back to the cabin wall. The old man seemed to be in a reverie and not to realize that Pricop was near. But suddenly, he turned round and asked with a laugh:

"Were you afraid I might say you were the oiler?"

Pricop drew a handkerchief out of his pocket, wiped his face, then shrugged:

"Not I," he said, a desperate determination showing in his whole body.

"That's a lie...You were afraid..."

Pricop looked around, turning his head in a movement that took only a fraction of a second, and made one step towards the chief engineer. The latter took hold of the bars that went across the entrance way to the machines.

"Now don't you try to pitch me overboard, or I'll do you in first, you bloody fool! And listen here, Pricop. Take my advice and disembark. I don't want to harm a fellow that has sailed with me on the *Arabella*. But I remember as if it was yesterday when some pimps stabbed Mareş at Hamburg, and he came to you half dead, how you stayed in bed with a tart, and refused to help him, so as not to have a headache. And when you killed that Dane at Malta, how was that? No, you're a swine, all right," the old man said without raising his voice and as if making a confidential confession. "You're a swine and had better quit this boat. I give you a month to get off here. But if you overstep that limit I'll tell your Communists everything I know, and God help you!"

Pricop did not answer. He clenched his jaws spasmodically.

"Understand? Get away, and to hell with you!" the old man said pleasantly.

Pricop cursed him fearfully between his teeth, his voice choking with fury and despair, as he took himself off.

✦

One of the first consequences of the Party meeting was the nomination and election of a new trade-union chairman — Prodan. The latter asked for a trade-union instructor to come from land and then there was a meeting during which Margarita Chivu complained of the lustful pursuit of Preţiosu and threw the money she had got as a bonus into Pricop's face.

"You gave it me to be nice to your Preţiosu, not because I worked any better than the others," she shouted, bursting into tears, while Pricop bent to pick up the notes

from the floor so as to control and arrange the expression on his face and that nobody might see his eyes.

At the same meeting the fishermen complained of the section which Spiru Vasiliu was in charge of ashore, as being responsible for the fishermen being left without the necessary equipment, and for the crews remaining incomplete for months on end. The trade-union instructor noted the complaint and sent a radio message to the fishermen's trust ashore. The director summoned Spiru Vasiliu and told him of the fishermen's complaints.

"We don't need such employees," the director said. "If you can't cope with your work, you'll have to leave at twenty-four hours' notice."

"Very good," Spiru Vasiliu answered submissively.

"That'll do."

"Right, Comrade," Spiru Vasiliu murmured and left the room on tiptoe, closing the door gently behind him. He had been mate of the *Arabella*, had once been flush with money, a fine, handsome, proud man who used to lord it over barmen, sailors, middlemen and prostitutes. But that Spiru Vasiliu was dead — he was no more.

XLII

In the last few months his face had become drawn; his eyes were blood-shot because of the many sleepless nights, and his continual fretting and heart-ache. He could never be sure that Angelica would marry him. He didn't even know if she loved him. Sometimes Angelica would be unusually kind and coaxing, though mistress of herself and mysterious, and he would feel an illusive kind of happiness. Then the next day she would be quite

different — a cold, jeering and hostile stranger, and Spiru Vasiliu would ask himself in his fear and despair: "What have I done to her? What has she got against me? Where do I fail her? In what did I displease her?" He would go to her home, even when he was sure he would find her door locked, yet knowing full well she was in. She would lock herself in her room on pretence of a headache or some other ailment, and then he would have to talk things over with Zarifu for long hours, after which the latter would also become cold and contemptuous and say:

"But do you really think you'll do anything? Aren't you just boasting?"

And he would wait for his answer with strained attention and an uncertain smile like that of a man condemned who has made his final effort and sees his last frail hope shattered, with unfailing perdition in store for him. And then, Spiru Vasiliu would collect his wits distracted by the anxiety to which Angelica had subjected him, and would bring forth arguments, seek reasons for his confidence; and with all his power pretend to be hopeful and sure of himself and their future — the future of the three of them.

"Yes, but we can't wait any longer," Zarifu would say with the obstinacy of the soft-minded aging man. "No, we can't wait, Spiru, we can't wait another year, not even a month or a day! Oh! how much longer, how much longer is there to wait? I shall die before the things you promise come to pass. Nor can Angelica wait. All kinds of young men without situations — young men as they turn them out nowadays — are after her," Mr. Zarifu added on one occasion, with the cruel cunning, to serve an idea that had become an obsession with him. That dealt Spiru Vasiliu a blow that

went straight to his heart and left him speechless for a moment.

"I watch over her, give her good advice," Zarifu continued sincerely. "I know the kind of life she might have if I were rich again. I know she should keep aloof, but she is too young, Spiru, and she has no experience. What I tell her seems mere idle talk, just dreams. She hasn't known the full, rich, comfortable life we have known. Do you understand? And one day she might play a trick on us..."

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" Spiru Vasiliu exclaimed in despair. "I can't turn myself into a boat, can I? Or shall I steal one on which we can get away? But how? From where?"

"Oh, but you must! You must! You're young, you've wits, you're bold and courageous. We must find some means," Mr. Zarifu repeated taking hold of Spiru's lapel and breathing into his face — a fetid, corpse-like breath. At such a time Spiru Vasiliu would rise and take leave, going down the stairs with his head between his hands. He would walk about the streets, wander about them endlessly, and finally land in Panaitaki's eating-house where he would sit for long hours in front of a glass of brandy, until Panaitaki turned him out to close the shop. And then Spiru Vasiliu would go home, slip into bed where he would toss hour after hour without sleeping, his brains aflame with problems and without a solution to them. The next day or the day after, Angelica would be sweet and loving again, and Spiru Vasiliu would float between heaven and earth. But then he would again be tortured and desperate when the mood of hostility possessed her and Spiru would feel he could no longer endure it, that life had ceased to be supportable, and sometimes even would contemplate committing

suicide. But a smile, a look of Angelica's clear, black eyes which were so deep would once more fill him with a humble, serf-like joy.

On such a day he bought tickets for the circus. Angelica wore a dress of pink silk, with puffed sleeves which became her to perfection, dark complexioned as she was, and with hair that had bluish tints in it. But there was something about the dress which recalled a night-dress and offended Spiru Vasiliu's taste. He had seen smart women in his life, and knew how a beautiful dress should look. Angelica's lack of taste humbled him. In former days he would never have gone out with a woman dressed in such a fashion. But he was afraid to say anything that might annoy her, so he set his jaws and looked neither to right nor left, though he felt the curious and sometimes amused looks of the people around.

After the performance, he took her to the "Sea Glamour" restaurant for an ice. And on his way he said to her:

"We'll soon have money, your father and I, and then we'll get dresses for you from the biggest houses in Paris."

"Rot !" Angelica said with a smile. "Where's the money to come from?"

"You'll see," Spiru Vasiliu said. "I've had money before and I'll have it again — like your father. And you shall go to the best places in Paris, my love. To Schiaparelli's, Balenciaga's, Patou's, Paquin's. In the loveliest rooms you shall tread on the thickest of carpets and try on the most wonderful dresses imaginable and there'll be soft, hidden lights; and perfume in the air — *Lanvin*, *Moment Suprême*, *Adoration*, *Désir*, *Invitation*...Only picture yourself there, and stepping into the street, with a fine car awaiting you — myself at the wheel. And driving along the great boulevards, towards the Champs

Elysées... Or, maybe, there'll be parties given by men of fashion where millionaires of world fame will kiss your hand: Wormson, the oil-king, or Mastokian, the jeweller; rich Americans having a fling in Paris; Argentine or Brazilian landowners with fingers loaded with brilliants. I saw one once who had pink brilliants on his finger and in his tie. People who've got power, Angelica, and money; people I've seen at Alexandria and Marseilles putting their cars on passenger ships so as not to have the trouble to buy one when they hopped from Marseilles to Alexandria to play cards or do some business in Egypt; or from Alexandria to Marseilles that they might motor from the South of France to Paris. I was a fool in those days not to try my hand at business. If only I'd had a shot... But now I'd heap up money for you, mountains of it, so as to make you as rich and elegant as any woman frequenting the big international hotels. You, too, shall live the life of the big hotels with their elegant suites of rooms, and meet the richest people; and be invited to all kinds of receptions, and see the greatest cinema stars, painters and writers that Paris raves over. And you shall be admired for your beauty and... elegance... elegance — oh, well, you'll be elegant then, all right," he concluded lamely, laughing lightly so as not to hurt Angelica.

But Angelica was thoughtful, remaining quiet and reserved. They went down to the dyke, where couples and groups of young people were walking and talking gaily, joking, and calling to one another. The port began on the other side of the "Sea Glamour." From here the Maritime Station could be seen and beyond it the masts, columns of smoke, and the prow — as big as a house — of a ten-thousand-ton cargo-boat made fast to the quay before the Maritime Station. Spiru Vasiliu went on

speaking, and the words he was uttering went to his head; he found himself speaking of things he had never spoken of before — memories of elegant men and especially of the rich, care-free, elegant women whom he had known in the big ports — everything which had made him dizzy many years ago, so that the life he had wasted on the fringe of this brilliant world seemed strange and unreal even now as he spoke; something false, a dream recalled, a vision dissolving into smoke. And there was reality: in the concrete quay, the boisterous sea which struck mercilessly against the blocks that built up the breakwater. It consisted — this reality — of the freight ships that clouded the port with their smoke; of the young and unconcerned people with their sleeves rolled up drinking beer at the tables around him. The things he spoke about to Angelica were so remote that they hardly existed, if indeed they existed at all... Hadn't they died in the meantime, like Zarifu's uncle in the Piraeus? Did the world of pleasure he had known still stand on its thin and fragile legs? An impulse, a blast, a mere shake and everything would break to smithereens and nothing be left. 'How long will things last there?' Spiru Vasiliu wondered and his heart contracted. 'If it would only last my lifetime!' he told himself. He took Angelica's hand and pressed it.

"Do you love me, Angelica?" he whispered to her, putting his head near hers.

Angelica drew her hand away without answering. She merely continued eating her ice. Spiru Vasiliu drew closer towards her and murmured:

"Don't you want to get married? How much longer shall we wait? There's no sense in dragging out things... Tomorrow I'll see to the papers. Do you want me to? Tomorrow! Shall I?"

Angelica suddenly became serious and put down her spoon.

"Will you let me begin? Tomorrow?" Spiru Vasiliu repeated with a happy smile.

"On no account," Angelica answered, and with such determination that she subsequently forced herself to add, by way of explaining or excusing her vehemence: "Let's wait a little longer — another two or three days..."

Spiru Vasiliu paled at her words. Angelica paled too and a green tint showed about her mouth, but for a different reason: two young girls who were seated with some cadets a few tables away from them had said something to the boys who turned towards Spiru and Angelica and began to laugh. Then they continued their talk, though now and again looking at the two and laughing. Spiru was too moved to notice their behaviour and anyway he wouldn't have noticed such things — but Angelica did.

"Ask for the bill, please," she said in a choking voice, with tears in her eyes, "and let's go. Let's go quickly."

She rose at once and made her way between the tables of the beer-drinking sailors who looked at her in admiration. Spiru had to wait rather a long time for the waiter and had to run to catch her up, for she had already gone some distance. She was hurrying home without waiting for him. Spiru Vasiliu came up with her beneath the pines that towered over the Casino. He took her by the arm — her soft and rounded arm with its fine cool skin — and asked her panting, for he was no longer a young lad of twenty and had run up the steps:

"What's the matter, Angelica? What's the matter with you?"

"Oh, leave me alone, leave me alone!" she burst out in an angry voice wrenching her arm from him. "Leave me alone, I tell you!"

She turned from him and hurried on. He followed speaking pleadingly to her, with fear in his heart. People turned round to look at them. Angelica was walking ahead and biting her lips. When she reached home she stopped and said to him:

"Will you leave me alone! I'm sick and tired of your tales! It's no use trying to charm me with such things!"

She turned her back on him and ran up the steps. Spiru Vasiliu heard her bang the door and lock it on the inside. He went about the streets in a daze, chewing at his fists in despair. 'How did I offend her? What has she got against me? What shall I do? Oh, God, what shall I do?'

He stopped to look about him. Where should he go? He couldn't go home. He felt that at home within the four walls of his room he would want to commit suicide, to knock his head against the wall and have done with the world for ever. What had Angelica said? 'Another two or three days...' Is that what a girl in love would say? Long ago, when Spiru Vasiliu was a child and had happened to be ill, that's what he had said to his mother when she had come with a spoonful of bitter medicine: 'Wait a bit; I'll take it, I'll take it, but a little later...' He shivered. No! she was not in love with him. She couldn't be if she spoke like that. Or was there some other reason? He asked himself this, with suddenly kindled hope — cursed, invincible, stubborn hope in spite of it all. Perhaps she had had enough of dreams, of unfulfilled desires. Hadn't she said: 'I'm sick and tired of your tales. It's no use trying to charm me with

such things !' Maybe that meant that she was mercenary, calculating, after money, bent on marrying a rich man. He might become a rich man if the dreams with which he delighted Zarifu, but which he, Spiru, did not believe in, came true. Yes, he might become rich then, very rich — and Angelica would marry him. Out of interest, without being in love with him, but she would marry him. And he was ready to accept anything, to undergo without hesitation any humiliation, if only he might hold Angelica in his arms. A rich man — but how to become one? How could he become rich, and quickly, very quickly, for — Zarifu had told him — young people were after her. At the thought that Angelia might not be his, Spiru Vasiliu clenched his teeth and felt his head ready to burst. With troubled, harassed eyes and a purple, blood-suffused face, the veins standing out on his temples, he entered Panaitaki's eating-house, determined to get drunk and forget.

He went in looking at no one, sat down, resting his elbows on the table and holding his head in his hands, staring at the dirty table-cloth like a madman.

He called for brandy. Panaitaki brought him a quarter which Spiru Vasiliu lost no time in gulping down, without any effect. He could not get drunk this evening. He was too strung up for that, too near something which he himself did not know. The brandy was only of help in that it enabled him to look around and begin to notice things — to see things less like a blind man. And when he looked up, the first man he saw was Pricop Danilov. There was a free table between them. And beyond it, Pricop sat facing him with a glass of green brandy at his elbow. His face was dark and stern; his jaws set tight, and he seemed to have

been thinking hard. He did not avoid Spiru Vasiliu's gaze: he was not keen on being alone.

"What's up with you, Danilov?" Vasiliu asked in a hoarse voice.

"Nothing much, I'm just having a drink. I came this morning with the fishing smack and will return on board tonight."

"Are you alone?"

"Alone."

"Bring your drink here!" Spiru Vasiliu said in a voice of command.

He had forgotten himself; his grief and the drink had made him speak, without his realizing it, like the mate of the *Arabella Robertson*, and not like the humble clerk Spiru Vasiliu.

"What's up, I say?" Spiru Vasiliu repeated his question in a harsh voice.

Pricop shrugged his shoulders.

"Hm, things going none too well."

"Has the Party chucked you out?"

Pricop did not answer. He was playing with a piece of bread on the table, rolling it between his fingers, flattening it.

"God damn the curs," he said between his teeth. "God damn them for being what they are."

And he cursed again, more extensively, then he laughed.

"I'm speaking to you because they'll fire you too. And others'll be fired as well. And besides... We've known each other for a long time now."

"Ever since the *Arabella*."

"Yes, since the *Arabella*."

"It was fine on the *Arabella*," Spiru Vasiliu said, laughing harshly, showing his wolf-like teeth. "It was fine indeed!"

Pricop sighed.

"Pricop," Spiru Vasiliu suddenly said excitedly. "We've been idiots, the greatest idiots on earth, do you hear? We deserve to have our necks wrung, to be spat at for living as we have done from hand to mouth, from one paltry stroke of business to the next. Doing a bit only when we were broke, and sitting comfortably and drinking when we weren't... We weren't serious. I know helmsmen, Pricop, helmsmen like you, who've got a big house and fortune..."

"Where's that?" Pricop asked.

"The devil take them... at Barcelona."

"That was through a bit of a white slave traffic," Pricop said calmly.

"That's their affair! The thing is they've made money, and they live fine. Wouldn't you if you could?"

Pricop shrugged as he said:

"I'd turn Moslem! Stand on my head! I'd even turn..."

He didn't say what he'd turn into. Spiru Vasiliu went on:

"Before the *Arabella* I was mate on a Turkish vessel. I was surprised to see the captain seeing to the cargo as if he'd been the mate. Then, when he realized I could be trusted, he told me he was transporting hashish. The cargo was just to fool the customs officers. He made a pile. Young and foolish as I was I only got a little hush-money on every voyage. He died a millionaire. Oh, I've lost so many chances of making a bit, so many!" he murmured between his teeth with concentrated fury and spite. "I was blind — an idiot — a great idiot! And look at me now! Look at me!"

"You're all right," Pricop said. "You might starve, but you've got a quiet life. You'd see the difference if you

were in my shoes. I've behaved decently towards all of 'em, never harmed anyone. I can say I have served the Party — yes, yes, you needn't laugh! And now they set on me like a pack of mad dogs. Ever since I've been on board that ship they've had their eye on me, and now they're ready to tear me to pieces. Especially that bloody spawn of a Jora. He's borne me a grudge for the last ten years, for ten years he's been waiting for me and he's got me at his mercy at last and has done for me. They've insulted me, trampled me underfoot, have p... on me as if I'd been a rotting carcass. They struck at me as if I wasn't a human being, had no feelings. But, by God... my time'll come and I shall not get any the kinder. I swear by my soul that I won't stop now until I've drawn blood..."

So they spoke, their heads close to one another, slowly and with feeling, for they both spoke about the greatest suffering they had ever experienced. Spiru Vasiliu said:

"You speak about your time coming. Rot! You're lost! You're wanted neither by the one side nor the other. You're finished!"

"I know! I know! Yet I can't leave it at that. There must be some way of escape for me. I can't be finished so easily," Pricop murmured with the self-assurance and energy that concealed rabid fury. "I can't. I just can't..."

"We're tied to the place, bound hand and foot — we can't go anywhere. Come on, Pricop, let's get away," Spiru Vasiliu said suddenly. "Let's get away! We'll find something to do — smuggling, anything, provided there's money in it! Oh! if only I had a ship to captain I'd be king of the world! I'd do what I want, go where I want, and get my paws on what my heart most desires. Oh, for a ship!"

He looked at Pricop in such a way that the latter became embarrassed despite his toughness. It was as if Spiru Vasiliu had before him a vision which blotted him out completely. He leant towards Pricop and said in a low voice:

"Let's get away on the *October Star!*"

Pricop blinked.

"The *Star?*"

"What, d'you think it is impossible? Has nothing like that happened before? At the moment these chaps here don't get on with the Turks any too well. Turks stop at nothing. We'll pose as political refugees. Demand asylum. Here we'll be called rogues and robbers for having stolen the State's ship, but our argument'll be that we had to flee because of our political convictions. We'll get some Turkish capitalist to take an interest in our venture, and he'll see that the right people in the right place get paid for it; and the Turks'll postpone the restitution of the vessel. And one fine day we'll slip out of Turkish waters and not even the devil'll be able to stop us then. With the flag of the Republic of Panama, we'll do all the business in the world. Credit'll be open to us immediately. We've got connections... That is, I've got connections in the ports. In a year we'll have enough to buy a ship. In two years, a second. In three years, a third. So in two or three years we can break off our partnership, Pricop, and you'll have your own ship, own it in your own right, with nobody to captain you, and will be able to order people about as you damn well please. If only we could manage it! If only we could!"

His imagination, the same that had played its tricks on Zarifu, and his tone of conviction with its ring of passionate intensity met no obstacle. Now they were invincible.

"Why didn't you get away before this?" he asked Pricop. "Why didn't you run for it?"

"I didn't think of the *Star*," Pricop said in a low voice. "I thought of getting away with a cutter, but it's not easy. The others don't want to go."

"Who, the fishermen?"

"Neither the fishermen nor the sailors. 'What do we want to slip away for?' they say. 'And what would we do in another country? Here we've got our homes, our wives and kids, and our job, our entire life's been spent here.' That's how they look at things. You might send them to the end of the world but they'd come back again. I didn't even dream of speaking to them; they'd have been down on me like the deuce. But with the *Star*... it'd be easy... easy."

"You could signal the engine room a change of direction late at night," Spiru Vasiliu said, "when they're all asleep. On waking we wouldn't have much farther to go."

And he began to laugh with nervous excitement.

"But what about the wireless operator?" Pricop asked.

"We'd bind him or..."

"We'd have to get hold of a pistol or two," Pricop murmured. "But I'd see to that."

"Yes, and I'd radio that all's well with the fishing," Spiru Vasiliu said, "and if anyone on board should show himself against us..."

"There will be someone," Pricop said slowly and looking down — "Jora. But it's all the same," he murmured, "all the same."

"And when one of 'em is seen writhing in his blood, the others'll not try any tricks on us," Spiru Vasiliu said.

He had grown pale, feeling sick at the thought of the blood that must be shed. And yet he would go on with it. He had to go on.

"When we've got started," Pricop said, "I know some two or three who'll come in with us. And they shall have pistols too. Yes! just two or three men with pistols'll keep the others quiet... One of them must be at the engines..."

And he went on in this strain speaking with precision, with organizational spirit. But Spiru Vasiliu was interested in these details only as a secondary matter. He had found the solution — that was the principal thing. He had found the way out of a situation which was stifling him. He knew that now there would be another pressure on his nerves: the time of waiting, the preparations, the decisive — the dangerous moment. But he was sure that after that Angelica would be in his power, that his desire would be satisfied even on that first night, the night of the deed and peril.

"I'll bring my wife on board with me," he murmured with unconcern.

Pricop looked at him for a moment, then looked down again.

"I didn't know you'd married..."

"Only recently," he said with the same light unconcern. "And you can be sure, I have no wish to leave my wife here... Nor my father..." He was thinking of Zarifu. It was Zarifu who had connections and not Spiru. He would have to be taken along too.

"That'll make things more difficult," Pricop murmured, still with downcast eyes.

"That's my affair. Come, let's drink to it! Good luck, Pricop! Good luck and good health! This time next year we'll be rich. You may even have your own ship by then."

They toasted each other in whispers, although Panaitaki's eating-house was deserted and their table was far from the cashier's desk, the kitchen and cellar doors. They clinked their glasses and drained them, then began discussing their plans and putting the finishing touches to them.

They went away only when Panaitaki closed his establishment. They walked about the street talking in low voices and breaking off their conversation when anyone drew near. Spiru who had often looked with distrust upon Pricop considering him dishonest, cunning and untrustworthy, said:

"Listen, Pricop."

"I'm listening."

"Be careful whatever you do. Don't breathe a word..."

"Stop it now. Do you think I relish the idea of putting my neck in a noose? Be careful yourself and say nothing to your wife..."

"No, I'll not tell her anything until I see her on board. I give you my word of honour," Spiru Vasiliu said solemnly.

And after agreeing when and where they would meet again, they separated, Spiru Vasiliu going straight to Zarifu's. Everybody in the street seemed to be sleeping deeply, but his knocking at the door woke up the dogs and they started barking loudly. Someone in the neighbourhood opened a window and asked who was knocking. A cold sweat covered Spiru Vasiliu. But at that moment Zarifu came to the door. He looked at him suspiciously keeping the door half-open.

"What is it? What have you come for?"

"Uncle Tasuli, it's me! Let me in!" Spiru whispered.

Zarifu, in his pyjamas, let him in and followed him to his room, his slippers clapping upon the floor. Within, Spiru leant towards him:

"Did you lock it?"

"What?" Zarifu asked, made nervous by the change that had come over Spiru's face: his bright eyes and features distored by an unnatural exhilaration.

"The door! The door! Did you lock it?"

Without waiting for an answer Spiru went and tried it. It was locked. Drawing the curtain aside he looked out of the window. No one was about. He turned and took old Zarifu by his thin shoulders:

"I've found a ship! We're leaving!"

The old man began stammering something, his eyes widening with surprise and puzzlement. Spiru explained to him in whispers, his words coming in a continuous stream, laughing nervously, while prodding his thin ribs with his finger.

"Do you understand? Do you understand?"

Suddenly Zarifu's face brightened, and, tickled by Spiru's prodding, he began to chuckle weakly. He took Spiru by the hand and together they started toeing a grotesque and graceless dance, laughing and repeating:

"We're leaving! We're leaving!"

Then he led him into Angelica's room, where the smell of cheap scent and her own particular fragrance went to Spiru Vasiliu's head. Exhausted with the emotions of the evening he leant against the door and understood little of what Zarifu was explaining to the girl or of the answers she was giving. Finally Zarifu pushed him out of the room, giving a weak, hoarse laugh and saying:

"Now off with you, it doesn't do to be in a young woman's room at night. Off with you, you lady-killer!"

And wishing Angelica good night with an aside ("but be careful, nobody must notice anything, and don't talk, father knows that you can keep a secret"), the old man himself went out and, catching Spiru by the sleeve and drawing him towards him, kissed him on both cheeks.

"You're like my son," he murmured in a voice full of emotion. "Angelica was my only child. Now I also have you."

He stroked his head and, although Spiru was nearly bald and there wasn't a generation between Zarifu's sixty years and Spiru's forty-five, Spiru let him stroke him. He was happy and intoxicated with the fragrance of Angelica's room, and, moreover, exhausted with fatigue.

In the meantime, on the quay Pricop was waiting for the cutter which was to take him to the *October Star*, and thinking. A clever fellow, Spiru Vasiliu. A bourgeois and the bourgeois have their heads on their shoulders... What Vasiliu had told him, he himself would tell Preţiosu... Sile, that drunkard, could be taken into their confidence. And so could Lae. But maybe they would have to find a fourth. With four armed men they could control the vessel.

And when he thought of Adam Jora, a shiver of pleasure went through him. It was long since he had felt any kind of pleasure. But a moment would come when he'd quench his thirst and allay the burning fever within him.

XLIII

With another three days to spend ashore Adam Jora worked feverishly that he might be free for a day and a half. He had finished everything by noon. In the

afternoon he had boarded the bus and was on his way to Danilofca. The bus ran along the white road with its chalk-like dust, between yellow fields of clay and dried grass, yellow beeches and a scintillating purple sea, jostling its sweating passengers; peasants with straw hats, women wrapped in shawls, a Tartar woman in lilac-coloured peg-top trousers and a few tractor-drivers whose hair needed cutting, in oil-soiled overalls. One of these had a shepherd's flute, and, until they reached Alibunar, played the songs of the shepherds who graze their sheep in the yellow steppe. The flute-player got down at Alibunar where he found waiting at the roadside some five young fellows of his own age with three grey tractors nearby covered with dust. After Alibunar the road drew away from the sea and passed between bare hillocks. At the top of one of these there was a sparrow hawk, and the shouting of the peasants as they leant from the bus-window caused the hawk to flutter its wings and soar into the air. Then the road again drew near to the sea, bringing a strong smell of the sea-weed that lay rotting on the beach in wide, brown lines.

Adam did not listen to the talk around him. And as he had been unaware of the tractor-driver's flute playing so was he unaware now of the smell of the sea. He had come this way from Danilofca a few years ago. He had felt he was going mad and would have liked to die. Now he was looking again at the broad, white road beyond the back of the driver whose shirt was sticking to him with sweat — looking and waiting for the towers of the Danilofca churches to appear at the far end, between the white earth and the blue sky.

When finally he saw them, his heart began to beat fast with expectation, fear and longing. But as he approached, the towers seemed to become smaller than

in the past and less beautiful. The bus stopped and the people began to get off. Adam Jora was the last to get down. He felt a strange, unaccountable dizziness. Looking down he saw the white dust characteristic of every Dobrujan village, and casting his eyes around he recognized every house — but how much lower they had become in the meantime, how much smaller! And less attractive than formerly; and the streets narrower. Adam Jora went down the village street and, as if in a dream, looked for a certain house. On his way he again passed by the well and the now tottering fences of Eftei Danilov's home. A group of women stood at the well and Adam stopped. It was here that Uliana had appeared to him. Opposite, in Eftei's courtyard, there was silence. A stooping old man with white hair and beard passed out of the open gate. For a moment Adam wondered whether it was Eftei. But it couldn't be: the figure he looked upon was too old and lanky. Adam continued his way. In a street he found some children playing in the dust. He asked them where Emelian Romanov's house was. They told him. Then he asked whether they knew anything about Uliana — with difficulty pronouncing "Danilova" — who was now living with the Romanovs. Yes, they knew about her too: Simion Danilov had turned her out of his house.

"Yes, that's her," Adam said, "Simion Danilov has turned her out of his house. Look! You go to her, for you're the oldest, and tell her so as no one should hear you, that someone has come from Constantza to see her and is waiting in the dell under the willows."

He made the child repeat what he had said, then gave him a gentle push with his palm against the side of his head saying: "Get along now!" And he went

to the little valley where he used to meet Uliana ten or fifteen years ago.

He found no willows there now, though: they had just been cut. One of them had been cut and left on the ground with its trunk peeled of its bark, another still had its branches and leaves. There were traces in the earth of a tractor-caterpillar and of iron wheels. The earth had been trampled upon and there was upturned sod here and there. The hemlock and weeds and balmy herbs were now dried up and burnt by the sun for lack of shade. Adam had thought he would find some shady spot here, where he could wait for Uliana under the trees, in silence and solitude. But there was neither solitude nor silence here. The sound of an axe could be heard in the willows that had not yet been felled — three of them, on the edge of the grove; while people passed along the road, upon which the tractor-caterpillars had left their mark and the cart wheels had cut deep ruts. Some of the passers-by looked at Adam with unconcern. Others did not even look. He stood among the willow-stumps showing white with the fresh cut. And standing there, he was clearly outlined against the pale sky. Uliana came almost at a run. She wore a blue dress faded by the sun, and a blue kerchief on her head; and she had put on shoes over her bare feet. She ran for a space, then walked to get her breath, but as soon as she could, she ran again. Then she caught sight of Adam and stopped. Adam came down to the roadside stopping a step away from Uliana.

"I've come to fetch you," Adam said.

Uliana looked at him. Although she was tall, she had to look up. She had tied her kerchief under her chin, which made her face look narrower than in former days. Uliana looked at him with her big, clear, bright

grey eyes which suddenly filled with tears. She stood there and looked at him with the tears running slowly down her cheeks, into the corners of her mouth and over her chin. In a few moments her face had become soft and gentle.

Adam found that she too was different from what she had been. She was a woman, not his dream, the vision of his love and imagination. She was less beautiful than he had known her in the years of their youth. And she seemed less tall too. A peasant woman. A fisherman's wife.

"I've come to fetch you."

"How did you know?" she whispered.

"From Emelian Romanov. Let's go."

He took her by the hand, but suddenly stopped and turned towards her:

"You've got no children?" Adam said.

Uliana stopped crying. She wiped her eyes with her fingers and shook her head:

"No, I've no children... and I think I can't have any..."

"Let's go," Adam again said gently.

But she had to go back to Emelian Romanov's wife first. She bent low before her in deep gratitude, then kissed her and told her that she would divorce Simion and marry Adam. And so she took leave and the two of them went away. They passed the place where the house of Adam and his mother had stood. The ruined walls had collapsed long ago. A little longer and they would be swallowed up by the earth altogether. Adam looked over his shoulder once, then went on his way.

That day the peasants in their carts, the lorry-drivers, the Turks astride their donkeys along the road

that runs from Danilofca to Constantza, sometimes along the sea, might have seen two wayfarers who looked at nobody, and walked as if they had been alone on the face of the earth. The man was tall and broad-shouldered, with a severe countenance, and the woman was also tall with unusually clear, luminous and transparent eyes. But nobody stopped to speak to them. The carts rumbled past them at the horses' trot, the lorries hooted and sped by in a cloud of dust, disappearing over the horizon of the steppe, and the Turks on their donkeys gave no heed to them, but went placidly on their way.

And Adam and Uliana went on, too, clasping each other tight by the hand. On one side was the sea, on the other the low hills, yellow like the coat of the steppe-rat that nibbles at the yellow ears of corn. The wind blew, wrapping them in clouds of dust. The sea roared solemnly in their ears. The setting sun poured down its warmth upon them and its golden light; and by and by a gentle lilac-coloured evening fell, flooding the horizon with a blaze of colour from the purple sea and the sky that was full of great motionless tongues of flame. The wind blew gently among the grass scorched by the heat. The crickets started their dry chirping as if little bones were being knocked together, to which the strains of thin, silver-wire cords were added. It became dark, but Adam and Uliana still went on walking along the road covered with thick dust, while over their heads the great, diamond-dotted constellations came out. It was a warm, bright night; the air soft and pervaded with the scent of the sun-soaked weeds: wormwood, mint and vervain with their sharp and disturbing fragrance.

Adam had decided to have no claim upon Uliana until they were married. But he did not really know

what he had decided. He hardly knew what he would do from one moment to the next. He held her by the hand, drawing her gently along the road and across the fields, and they trod the dry grass and balmy weeds underfoot which gave forth a still stronger fragrance. They reached the foot of a hillock. Frightened creatures — rats and quail — went through the hay with a rustle. Adam drew Uliana to him and laid her on the earth still warm with the day's sun.

The chirping of crickets around them might have been of hundreds of thousands; it was like a sound issuing from the warm earth and seemed to vibrate with the breath of night. From behind the hillock the moon rose over the empty steppe — red at first like the sun — flecked dust floating over the Dobruja, then yellow as honey. It lighted the whole steppe, and cast the shadow of every straw. It was only on this side of the hillock that darkness prevailed: here the earth was warm and the fragrance was of wormwood, and Uliana moaned and caught her breath as if in pain, though not in pain.

And beyond the road the roar of the sea could be heard.

Late that night Adam stroked Uliana's face and under his rough fingers he seemed to feel the fresh face of a child. Yet he was disappointed, felt something was lacking, himself unsatisfied. He took her in his arms again, kissed her frantically, crushing her lips against his, and, between short quick gasps, whispered:

"I don't know what to do with you. I'd like you to be within me, right here..."

And he pressed Uliana against his breast, against his body, until she cried out. But this did not appease his desire. He had not known before that the body's

embrace and happiness could leave one unsatisfied, just as sea water cannot quench one's thirst.

XLIV

For two nights Spiru Vasiliu had hardly closed his eyes. He had been unable to sleep. He couldn't even lie down for long. Hardly had he thrown himself down for a moment than he would start, sit up in bed, all strained attention, waiting for time to pass. But time was at a standstill. Nothing was happening. The tin alarm clock by his bedside ticked too slowly. From outside came the continuous rumble of trains, the sound of metal upon metal and now and again, a siren with its gruff, prolonged wail — Spiru lived in a street very near to the port. He would soon hear the same noises in another port. In a remote port. To begin with he would be in a poor room, as here. But in that little room a new life would begin, and his lust for pleasure and wealth and power would soon be satisfied. Business deals would follow one after the other; more and more business, more and more money, more and more women. For Angelica would not be the only one. However, first he would have Angelica for himself in a little room in Istambul or Izmir. And that little room would smell like Angelica's room in Zarifu's house. Spiru Vasiliu looked at the floor of unpainted boards and was choked with emotion at the expectation of his happiness. The sunlight had drawn a brilliant yellow rectangle on the floor. Spiru Vasiliu sat looking at this spot of light. Now and again he realized that the spot had moved, that it was more to the left, had grown longer, had taken on an orange colour. Finally the whole room was filled with a reddish glow.

Then it grew dark. Several times Spiru Vasiliu struck a match. The hands of the clock were no longer moving? He put it to his ear, and found that it ticked. But still he wound it up. How if it stopped right now and caused him to be late for the meeting? But he couldn't go there too early either. He would attract attention. Things would look suspicious, trifling occurrences might mean disaster. No, he would be there at 11 o'clock sharp. He would not switch on the light, for fear someone might decide he was at home, drop in and keep him talking. The clock went on ticking slowly.

Spiru dressed himself and put on his shoes to be quite ready. He then set himself to wait again, seated on his bed in the dark, with a kind of vacancy within him — a cold vacancy.

Suddenly he gave a start, seized by a terrible fear of being too late. Had he overslept? Was he late? His heart thumping, he struck a match which broke between his trembling fingers and dropped it on the floor. He trod on it and struck another which also broke. On striking the third, he saw that it was ten to eleven. He got out of the room somehow, locking the door behind him, but, being nervous, he didn't even know that he hadn't locked it properly, and made towards the meeting place almost at a run, his chin resting on his chest and his hands in his pockets. There was another danger ahead: he might meet someone he knew. Still walking hurriedly, he took the streets at the end of which the sea could be seen glimmering in the moonlight. His breath came in quick, short gasps. There didn't seem to be enough air.

He met no one. He descended quickly to the port. He had his permit to enter it, and, as usual, came up against no difficulty. For a moment he thought of asking

one of the militiamen whether Zarifu and Angelica had passed that way, but realized his insane imprudence in time and only laughed nervously. He spoke to no one, and made his way at a swift pace among rows of lorries which had been unloaded from a Polish cargo-boat, among great weight-drawing tractors and the comings and goings of the porters. In the dazzling light of reflectors, a Soviet and a Swedish vessel were unloading and loading. High up, their elbows resting on the rails, sailors could be seen smoking and looking down upon the quay where armed frontier guards patrolled. They did not see him passing between the porters and the workers on the quay. Tomorrow, he would be a long way out to sea and maybe tomorrow night at this time he would be in Turkey. What would happen in between was still to be seen.

Pricop had concealed weapons on board the ship, and was he not now waiting for him on the cutter with the last two pistols tied to his shins under his wide sailor's trousers? Maybe Angelica and Zarifu were already there with papers forged in the name of a mechanic and a woman worker of the tinning factory who had been left ashore. Spiru Vasiliu quickened his step, hardly keeping himself from running behind the silos with their deep entrances into which railway lines ran, and out of which a stale, death-like air issued, mixed with the smell of mice and long-stored grain. From here he went round an administration building and on to the quay of the fishing port. To the left there were lifeboats, motor-boats that were no longer in use and the former royal yacht, which the king of the country had bought some fifty years before from old Mrs. Vandelaer, a rich American, and to which weeds now clung along the Plimsoll line as it lay moored to the quay, abandoned.

Farther away, a big cargo-boat in process of being completed rose like a city wall, with spaces through which the starry sky could be seen where the iron sheets were missing. Through those big empty spaces the last parts of the machinery would be hauled up and assembled. 'That's the kind of boat for me,' Spiru Vasiliu was thinking regretfully, comparing it mentally with the small and ancient *October Star*, formerly the *Theodora*, formerly the *Punta Delgada*, formerly the *Störtebecker*, launched from some shipyard in the Baltic in 1902, and boasting a speed that was half of what this giant lying now in dry dock could do. "But it doesn't matter, it doesn't matter in the least ! The *Star*'ll be mine, in my possession !" he told himself still breathing heavily and now with a strange feeling of clarity in his head, as if he were walking in some vivid dream, after having dosed himself with cocaine.

The quay smelt of fish, tar, and gasoline. On it were piled-up cases, and two or three men sitting on some steps, smoking and talking in low voices. A solitary guard with shouldered rifle patrolled about. The thick, dirty water moved lazily, heavily, carrying old papers, ray heads and pieces of timber. But not a single cutter was in the fishing port. Nor was Pricop to be seen anywhere. Angelica and Zarifu were nowhere to be seen either. Spiru Vasiliu stopped short, while his heart suspended its beating for a moment or two, then suddenly began to thump hard so that it nearly choked him. Spiru pressed his hand to his heart. He breathed deeply several times and with a great effort. There was no time to be lost. The appointed time, the time of their flight had come. In a few moments they should have sailed. Spiru Vasiliu drew near the men smoking on the steps. He felt his legs giving way under him,

his knees going all soft and a great faintness seizing him. With a strange, uncertain voice he said:

"Good evening to you..."

"Evening," they murmured, turning to look at him.

"The cutter... which was to go to meet the fleet... What's happened to it? Hasn't it come in yet?"

"There was a cutter, but it left an hour ago," one of the men said with calm indifference.

"The one that was to meet the fleet!" Spiru said. "That's the one I'm speaking about. It doesn't seem to have come!"

The men sitting on the steps looked at him surprised and curious.

"That's the one, Comrade," the man who had spoken first said. "It was here and left. The helmsman was one Pricop who works on the *Star*. He said you should have come too, but that you'd changed your mind and he was leaving by himself..."

"Ah, so that's it!" Spiru Vasiliu said chokingly.

He turned his back on them and went away with unsteady steps. He was afraid he might fall, faint there in front of them. He went behind the administration building to hide himself. He leant against the wall, his cheek against the rough cold plaster.

He stood there, he knew not how long. Then he went back a few steps and looked furtively round the corner of the building to see whether there really was no boat. No, the cutter wasn't there. It was plain. He had trusted Pricop, that lawless robber and murderer. He went away slowly, raising his face in sorrow towards the night sky full of great, unmoving constellations. A cold sweat ran down his face and his whole body.

He went out of the port and made his way towards Zarifu's house. He must at least protect Angelica from

the danger of coming to the port now. He knew he would not meet them. He was sure that at that moment they were making for the port along a different way. He returned and stationed himself high up above the "Sea Glamour" before entrance number I. Yes, that was how it would be: his plan would fail. From the very first moment he had had a secret feeling of failure, of disaster. He could not succeed. His dreams, his plans, his words had gone to his head. He had always felt deep down within himself that he would fail miserably. The whole thing had been started clumsily from the very beginning. Yes, the whole thing.

He could not think further, although he knew what would come now. He asked a passer-by what time it was. It was past midnight. Spiru Vasiliu made his way towards Zarifu's house. The passer-by of whom he had asked the time stood still for a moment, looking at him, surprised by the look and voice of this man who seemed to be ill.

There was light at Zarifu's window. Spiru went up the stairs and pressed the door handle without knocking. He walked as if in a dream. As in a dream, the door opened and Spiru went in.

Old Zarifu kneeling at Angelica's feet, his hands on her hips, was speaking to her, crying piteously as he raised his face towards her. When Spiru entered, they both turned round. Angelica who had been standing stiffly, like a block of stone, obtusely stubborn, with a bored look on her face, appeared frightened and became as white as a sheet. Zarifu rose and came towards Spiru, his shoulders bent, a crushed old man. He said sobbing:

"You... you speak to her! Tell her! Convince her! She'll ruin us. She'll destroy us! She refuses to leave! Spiru, my son! Speak to her!"

"It's no good his speaking to me!" she said venomously. "He's spoken to me for months and it's no good. He won't convince me now! I won't go. I'll never go anywhere with him!" She was speaking to Zarifu but looking at Spiru. "I don't love him! I don't care a hang about him! I've had enough, enough of it! I'm tired of it all! So leave me alone, leave me alone!" she shouted, bursting into tears.

Still crying, she crept behind the stove.

"Only leave me alone, leave me alone and don't torture me. Please don't torture me," she went on, her distressed face hidden between the corner of the stove and the wall.

Zarifu was exhausted. Spiru, on the other hand, felt all his submissiveness, all the humiliations, all the slavery, all his fierce desire that had been given no satisfaction for so long surging up within him. He was pale. There was in his eyes an insane glimmer as in a patient feverish with malaria.

"So, you are tired of it! You've had enough of it! And I am torturing you! After I've crawled like a worm before you, after you've made a laughing-stock of me, after I've become unmanly, lost all my pride, you are the victim!... Not I who've suffered all your tantrums, all your fine ways, all the stupid stubbornness of a half-baked young woman. I who have trembled with fear at the thought of having annoyed you, who have submitted to you at a glance; was attentive to your slightest wish, denied myself in every way, trampled my dignity underfoot, forgot about myself, became a puppet, a door-mat, only to please you. I even put a noose round my neck to make you rich and happy, I dared what no one else has dared for an unworthy bit of a thing like you — a poor waif on whom I wouldn't have

wasted a look in the old days, wouldn't even have noticed. Could have found hundreds like you, if I'd wanted them, but they didn't interest me. I looked for something bigger ! I had to become middle-aged, to be tired, poor and worn-out to give everything I had to a chit like you who played with my heart and my life as she played with marbles not so many years ago in the dust of Papapericlis Street ! And I loved you, I loved you as I never loved anyone, for it wasn't necessary to be in love in the old days to have any woman I wanted. And now, at the end, when I know that I shall never be in love again, shall never be happy any more, you've brought me to ruin, brought me to nought, destroyed my last chance, my last try, the last surge of love, more effectively than if you'd dug your knife into me, because you've killed what still flickered, what gave me youth and life — hope. There would have been a future ahead of me through you. Now there's none. Nothing ! You've crushed me, broken me. That's what you've done; you can be proud of your work. I congratulate you, and I wish from the bottom of my heart that the day will come when you'll writhe and fret as I've writhed and fretted ! When you'll find some idiot to make you his puppet, trample you underfoot — but no, you'll never come to that because you'd have to fall in love first and *that* you're incapable of doing. All you're able to do is marry some little two-penny-ha'penny clerk, beget children and take the pram along the dyke on Sundays, dressed in a pink dress with puff sleeves. My love, my only love ! And even if you ever endure what I have endured, it'll be too late for me to rejoice. For I'll be old, or dead, and shan't know about it. You can't even give me that satisfaction. You'll be indifferent to me. Indeed everything's indifferent to me now. I'm finished !"

Towards the end he had spoken like a man soliloquizing, speaking his thoughts aloud. His fierce, sickly passion had died out. He turned round and left the room, without even closing the door behind him.

Zarifu rushed out to him, panting and shouting in his broken voice:

"Spiru, Spiru, don't leave without me! Don't leave without us!"

Then, distracted, he returned to the room. Angelica had ceased crying almost immediately Spiru Vasiliu had started talking. She had slowly come out from behind the stove. Now she was furious. Zarifu took her by the hand and tried to drag her towards the door.

"Stop him," he said. "Run after him! He's leaving without us! Angelica! My child, my little girl! Don't be the ruin of me! Stop him! Call him back!"

"I won't," Angelica shouted in exasperation, wrenching herself away from Zarifu's hands. "He makes me sick. Why, he's bald!"

"What does it matter? He'll be rich! You'll be able to have as many handsome young men as you want, with plenty of hair. He'll be rich. You're losing your only chance in life."

"I don't mind! He makes me sick! He's made a laughing-stock of me in the town. When my school friends see me in the street with him, they giggle. They go about with boys of their own age and I with an old man!"

"Why should you care? Just pretend you don't see," Zarifu said in distraction. He hardly knew what he was saying, what he was doing. He fell on his knees, tears running down his face:

"My child, can't you pity your daddy who loves you? Do it for me, at least! For your daddy! Please!"

he groaned in despair, joining his hands as if in front of an icon.

"Marry him yourself if you love him so!" Angelica burst out in hatred, and she again returned to the stove.

Zarifu took his head between his hands and, kneeling in the middle of the room, began to sway backwards and forwards in his agony of mind, murmuring: "My ship! My firm! My fortune! My future... Everything gone!... Everything gone!... Everything!... I've nothing left... Nothing!"

Suddenly he jumped up as if a spring had worked, and rushed at her and pulled her roughly by the hand.

"Go after him at once and bring him back, or I'll strangle you!" he said fiercely. "If you don't know what your own interests are, I do! Away with you!"

But Angelica opposed him with cold stubbornness until she suddenly burst out:

"He won't be able to get anywhere! If you like to know, I went to the guards a little while ago and told them he was going to slip off in the cutter, he and that Pricop, and that he wanted to take me with him, but that I had no intention of going! I thought he's already gone, that's why I was frightened when I saw him! Don't be afraid for us though, nothing'll happen to us."

She was playing about nervously with her fingers. Evidently she wasn't lying. Mr. Zarifu stared at her. Then he asked in a stammer: "Wha-what did you say?" and then "What? What?" several times. Nervous and frightened at what she had done, Angelica explained everything. Mr. Zarifu suddenly calmed down. His face had turned an ashy colour and he seemed smaller and more wizened than ever. It was as if he had withdrawn into himself, had become sucked in, like a deflated balloon. He turned his back on Angelica and went back

to the sofa, lying with his face towards the wall, and shortly fell into an agitated sleep groaning and sighing and tossing about. Angelica waited for an hour or two, then put on her coat, approached on tiptoe the sofa where Zarifu was laying, and gropingly sought his old gold watch which he had mechanically put on the chair beside it. With the watch clutched tightly, Angelica went out to the landing that gave on to the staircase with the queer drawings on the wall, and descended the stairs quickly, making them creak. She banged the door and started running through the dark streets.

Zarifu heard the noise of the door. In his dream it was the rumble of the engines of the *Angelica*, the biggest cargo-boat of the Zarifu Company — a *Liberty* ship of ten thousand tons bought cheaply by bribing an American clerk. Angelica herself was travelling on a white passenger ship of the *Messageries Maritimes* and waving her handkerchief from the promenade deck. Full of emotion and parental love, Mr. Zarifu awoke and suddenly remembered what had happened. He jumped up with a beating heart.

"Angelica !" he shouted in his weak, hoarse voice.

There was no answer. Zarifu rose with difficulty and went to wake up his daughter. The door of her room was open and the untidy bed, the general disorder, the empty room suddenly made his blood freeze in his veins. An unpleasant emotion shook his body.

"Angelica !" Zarifu shouted again.

He rushed over to his room. Angelica was obviously not there. Seized by a fearful suspicion, he came out of it with agility and went down to the street door. It was unlocked. Groaning weakly like an injured dog, Mr. Zarifu returned to the room he had fallen asleep in, and noticed that his watch, which he put every night

on a chair by the sofa on which he slept, was missing.

"Angelica... my little girl... My child..." he moaned dolefully.

With trembling legs, he went down again to the street door, though slowly now, looked out, but saw no one. Returning to the room upstairs he reached the middle of it when he felt a horrible nausea and dizziness. His legs gave way and everything in his mind concentrated on his terrible feeling of physical distress, disgust, helplessness and overwhelming sickness.

On the third day, some fellow clerks of his came to see why he hadn't come to the office. They found all the doors open and Mr. Zarifu's corpse in one of the rooms — a small, shrivelled thing lying on the worn-out carpet. The room gave off a sickly, sweet smell: he was already in a state of decay.

On the night of Zarifu's death Angelica had gone to her young friend and they both disappeared from Constantza.

While Angelica was running along the deserted streets to knock at the door of her sweetheart, a picket-boat had put out to sea to look for the *October Star*; in the meantime Spiru Vasiliu, who knew nothing about all this, sat in a third-class compartment in a train that took him to Bucharest. From Bucharest he decided he would go farther, to some remote corner where he would lose himself. Around him, the other passengers were sleeping: women, peasants and workers, young people with portmanteaux, boxes, sacks and knapsacks. The blue light was soothing and all except Spiru Vasiliu dozed, or even slept deeply. He was thinking of his past life, making up his accounts. What would happen from now on was of no importance.

But his past so far was plain: a number of small senseless events, of brutal or ridiculous scenes, of bouts of drunkenness, of fornication without meaning, like the troubled dreams of a man with a bad digestion. Everything had been in vain, had been of no use to anyone or anything. He might have been dead — or not have been born at all. It would have been just the same. And, maybe, it would have been better like that. Not so long ago, when Angelica was torturing him, he had wanted to commit suicide. Why? What purpose would it have served? He had always been dead. Always been without importance. "Why? Good God, why?" Spiru Vasiliu murmured helplessly leaning back on the hard seat and raising a face clammy with cold sweat. The wheels rattled on the rails, the carriage shook Spiru pitilessly on its hard springs, and the train went ever deeper into the night, into emptiness, into nothingness.

After the most fearful night in his life, Spiru Vasiliu got down at a station in Bucharest. His face was the colour of earth, his eyes bloodshot and troubled. Before going out of the station he went into a lavatory, and there, while he washed his hands in the basin, he looked mechanically into the blotted mirror upon the wall over the tap. But almost immediately, without knowing why, he looked away, refusing to see his own face. He bent, took up his cardboard suitcase and left the place. Walking through Bucharest on a grey, sad morning, he thought how much better it would be to cease to live. What great happiness it would be to know nothing, not to exist, to end eveything. What rest! But he hadn't enough courage, enough strength to commit suicide. So he made his way to some relations whom he asked to put him up for a day or two until he should go on to his destination. They gave him a sofa

behind a screen. He went to bed immediately and fell into a deep sleep. He slept without moving, without dreams, without awaking a moment, like an animal, throughout that day and the night that followed. In the morning he took his suitcase, thanked his relations and told them he was going to the station whence he would leave for the country to find work on a construction site. Nobody saw or heard of him again.

XLV

Despite his cunning, Pricop was a simple man. And his life had been simple too: a bout of drunkenness, a visit to a sailor's brothel were his only pleasures in the old days when he had been of the crew of the *Arabella Robertson*. Later, he had become more sedate and had given up even these indulgences. He took pleasure in nothing — was unable to feel any. The sullen satisfaction of ruling the roost on the *October Star* had superseded them. When he had collapsed, he had suffered fearfully — fierce spite and humiliation had lacerated his heart. And now, since Spiru Vasiliu had set forth his plan, a new idea had taken possession of him. He had never imagined before that he might be rich, that he might be a bourgeois with capital and a ship of his own. Now, however, from the very first moment, he had thought of ruling out Spiru Vasiliu. The ship was to be his, his alone — should belong to no one but Pricop Danilov, shipowner. His father, Eftei, had owned public houses and fishing-boats. He would have a ship. He would have power over all on it: the crew, the officers, even the captain; he would have money, and the expensive pleasures he had heard about in the ports, but

which, like the luxurious restaurants, like the smart women, were only for the rich.

So far, everything had gone swimmingly. It was late, no one stirred on board. The *October Star* was slowly going out of its course. Preţiosu, in his cabin, Lae and the store-keeper in the crew's quarters, were waiting. The weapons were hidden in Preţiosu's cabin, in Pricop's and in the boxes of the other two. In an hour at most, Pricop would come out of his cabin, his pistol in his pocket, and, together with Preţiosu, go up to the captain's deck. The boilers were under pressure. The only thing needed was to push forward the handle of the telegraph which controlled the machines to top speed. With the helmsman and the officer on duty in one of the watch cabins, their arms bound behind their backs, and Preţiosu at the helm, Pricop would go to the wireless cabin and put it out of action with a few blows. Then...

Then, it would be morning. Adam Jora would appear on deck, and would be shot the first moment.

Pricop sat on his bed, rubbing his clammy hands. A hardly perceptible trembling of his body, an incredible state of awareness and a strange clarity of his mind, now, in the depth of night, were the only signs that anything unusual was afoot. He sat waiting for the time to pass.

He was not a man of imagination and could not picture to himself how things might go. He knew only that, on Adam Jora's appearing, he would raise his pistol, aim straight at his breast and fire once, twice, three times, until he saw him fall. Not another shot. Until he saw him on deck, until then. First to see Adam Jora's blood flowing on deck; to trample underfoot his dead body; to tread on his face with his boot.

He could wait no longer. The night was not so long. The hours when everybody was asleep on shore must

be made good use of. With his damp, clammy hand, he opened the box where he had put the pistol and drew it out — it seemed very heavy for its size — and put it in his pocket. He had some boxes of cartridges, no bigger than match boxes, but far heavier.

He thrust two boxes into his pocket and went out after locking the door. He would first look around to see whether everything was quiet. Then he would call Preţiosu and start the show.

Out on the upper deck, the wind was blowing. There were big, bright stars, and those that were lower down the firmament were reflected in the sea. All along the horizon the position lights of the cutters were glimmering. The vessel would have to pass them on its south-west course. But with the engines they had, it would be too late to raise the alarm when they had reached the shore.

Somebody came down the steps from the wireless operator's cabin. Pricop slipped into an obscure corner. Without noticing him, the man hurried up towards the captain's cabin. A radio-message at this time? Pricop asked himself and suddenly cold sweat covered him. It didn't matter, though; he would be ahead of the captain. Pricop went quickly towards Preţiosu's cabin.

The same moment he heard the throb of the engine of a cutter approaching the vessel. It had come from land and the wind, blowing from the east, had not brought the sound before. Some madmen of course such as Emelian Romanov or Luca Gheorghe, or the youth brigade who were coming with their catch. Pricop hesitated a moment. They would want to unload their catch. They must not be frightened from the very beginning, it must not be known just yet... He must wait. He must keep quiet and let the fishermen embark again —

it wouldn't take them more than an hour. On the bridge above someone manoeuvred the starboard searchlight that the fishermen might see where the cable that would make fast the cutter to the vessel should be thrown. He returned to his own cabin and, as he was entering, heard a voice from the sea below, shouting in a tone of command:

"Put out that reflector !"

Being occupied with his thoughts and the fear lest the radiogram might upset his plans, the command did not astonish him. He sat on the bed again, waiting. It was only later, when he heard voices and the loud tramp of heavy boots, and not the soft tread of bare feet or of rubber boots, that he realized something was amiss, and that the sound was spreading all over the ship. He thought of going out of the cabin but he refrained and remained where he was. Suddenly the place seemed stifling to him. There was no port-hole, only a wicket cut in the door and opening onto the corridor. He kept himself from opening the door, decided to count up to a thousand before opening it, then changed it to a hundred. He counted thirty, rose and went out. A very powerful electric light was flashed in his direction, dazzling him. No word was spoken. Pricop asked in a faltering voice:

"Who's there? What is it?"

"Get inside again, Comrade," someone said sharply from the dark.

Pricop went back into his cabin, closed the door and waited. He couldn't think. Sweat was running down his cheeks and neck and right down his spine.

The heavy tread of feet drew near. Suddenly the door opened and again he was dazzled by a strong flash of light. An officer of the frontier guards entered, followed by another two officers. There was hardly room

enough for them to move. They began searching Pricop for weapons. They took his pistol and the boxes of cartridges.

"Take him out," the officer said.

The soldiers took Pricop out and up to the upper deck. There were many of them and they were all armed. The reflector had been put out. Guarded by soldiers, Pricop could guess at, rather than see, the lanky figure of Preţiosu. He was standing silent in the darkness.

Later, they took him down the big stairway which was only used when landing. For some reason they didn't want the culprits to go down Jacob's ladder. Maybe to prevent their throwing themselves down and breaking their bones upon the deck of the cutter or drowning if they dropped into the water. They descended the steps, one at a time, slowly, between two frontier guards. Suddenly Pricop groaned and tried to free himself, to jump the thin chain which did duty as a rail, but the frontier guard held him fast by the arm:

"Just a minute, Brother... take it easy... and you, Constantin, keep a tight hold..."

Pricop had begun to tremble. His teeth were chattering and it was only when the cutter drew away from the big, dark ship that he quieted down. He sat hunched up between the frontier guards, with Preţiosu crouching beside him. They had put Lae and the other chap down in the hold.

Pricop sat looking at the vessel as long as he could see it dwindling, melting in the dark night, with the position lights hanging in empty space, like a constellation. The water swirled about the cutter, the engine gave a muffled roar, the frontier guards coughed now and then, or yawned.

Suddenly Preţiosu said:

"See what you've brought me to!... My God! what you've brought me to!"

"Shut up!" a sergeant shouted. "You're not allowed to speak among yourselves."

Preţiosu was silent after that. He merely turned towards Pricop and glared at him through the darkness with eyes lit up with venom. Suddenly he spat in his face. The frontier guard pulled him away.

"Some devil of a man, this," one of them murmured.

XLVI

In the green darkness of the depths, on the shell-scattered banks — the pasture land of the fish — there in the half shades of the bitter waters the colour of gall, the cod chase the silvery pilchard and the flat, spiky ray, swallowing them in a flash; the sturgeon dart after young herrings, the sharks swallow the bigger fry, and the ray crawl in the mud, making groping undulations with their flat bodies and feeding upon slimy, crawling things without eyes or brains; while in the sweet, warm waters of the Danube backwaters, and in the warm, salty waters along the shore, the spawn of myriad cod, pilchard and sturgeon hatch. And in the dark depths the young grow and wander and rush with lightning speed upon their living food or scuttle away arrow-like when the gaping, greedy mouth and the rounded, immobile eyes of a white-bellied giant project themselves out of the greenish darkness.

Ever ravenous, the fish wander through the valleys of mud, across the sandy plains, and the rocky cliffs where it is cold and dark, and where the pressure of the water is like a dead weight. Lying in wait, they dash

at one another, catch and swallow. Sometimes, they come across pieces of the silvery pilchard. And then, with a single flap of their tail and fins, they are upon them and swallow them. And they swallow the steel hook too which sticks in their mouth, and causes them to struggle wildly, though, with their minds cut out according to the darkness of the depths, they are unable to understand what has happened. After which they remain pinned motionless to the spot, the dolphins dying when the fifteen minutes, which they can spend in the depths without drawing air into their lungs, are up.

And Emelian Romanov or Luca Gheorghe, Iermolai or any other fisherman in the boats scattered densely over the sea, would draw up the several mile-long fishing-line. Ten to fifteen thousand times a day they made the same difficult and tiring movement with their arms, stopping only to struggle with the big fishes, stick their gaff into their heart, or kill them with their maul; after which they would take them to the mother-ship.

The cranes of the *October Star* would take up the net full of purple, grey, brown spindle-like bodies with white bellies: sea monsters with spiky heads; cod bigger than a man and heavier than three men; ray which had lived for dozens of years swimming on one side with the white of them facing downwards, and now that they were dead with the brown side lowermost as the fishermen had cast them; sharks with bellies full of half-digested fish; dolphins of a glossy black, sturgeon with rows of spikes all over their bodies — all of which, when the string at the bottom of the net was drawn, would fall upon the deck with a plash — a stream of cold, slippery bodies.

They ripped them open, turned the water hose upon them, cut them into pieces and salted them, froze them in the refrigerators, fried and boiled them in hermetically sealed cauldrons. The upper deck of the *October Star* streamed with the blood and the black and brown liquid that oozed from them; the pinky, purplish and red entrails floated on the waters around the vessel. The sea-gulls sped after them shrieking wildly, fighting for them with their sharp beaks and with a great flutter of wings. The *October Star* floated under the odour of fried fish and hot fish grease. And the fishing smacks ceaselessly took ashore their cargo of tinned fish and returned with a cargo of empty tins. The men worked day and night, drawing the fishing-lines out of the water in the moonlight as the days were too hot, and then taking the fish to the mother-ship in the daytime.The results of the emulation drive were posted up on a blackboard on the forecastle deck and topping the list was Cosma's youth brigade, the very Cosma who had been in Romanov's boat. The trade union was striving to make the whole fishing fleet engage in the emulation; the Party organization worked better; two young instructors had been sent over from the coast. Adam never left the ship now.

When he came ashore, he spent all his spare time with Uliana. All he needed was to know she was with him, even though he might not talk to her, or look at her, or hear her speak. He would make love to her all night, tenderly, passionately, or again with pity or hostility, but neither he nor Uliana tired of their love. Uliana was happy; Adam, however, felt something was missing. Then he went to sea again and realized what it was: it was Uliana. So he returned to her, possessed by mad desire, but even whilst holding her in his arms,

his happiness seemed a troubled, bitter kind of happiness once more. Why?

Adam soon began to realize a thing which had been there all the time, a thing that came to him again and again and which he tried to drive out of his heart, but without success. Whenever he came ashore, there was a lot of work for him at the regional committee: reports to be drawn up, meetings to attend, or a lesson or lecture to take part in, in between his other work. He came home late at night, sometimes after midnight. He had a room in the building of the local newspaper, and opening straight into the courtyard. In it was a metal bedstead, a carpet of the kind they make at Danilofca hanging on the wall, Lenin's portrait, a book-shelf, a cupboard, a table, two chairs and a straw mat on the floor, as in a monk's cell. He had never thought much about clothing or the things in the house, or choice food. He had had no opportunity to acquire a taste for them; how could he have acquired such a taste? As a lad amidst hardships? In the salt mine, during his imprisonment? On the wharfs of the port, carrying sacks on his back? Along the roads and highways of the Dobruja? His joys and pleasures were derived not so much from things as from the men he had to deal with.

And the person nearest to him gave him no joy. He pressed Uliana to his breast, fit to crush her; he made love to her at night — an ardent love without satiety; but he did not speak to her, and sometimes looked only sideways at her or did not look at her at all, casting his eyes to the ground and smiling a forced, false smile.

One Sunday afternoon they were preparing to go to the theatre. Uliana sat on the side of the bed plait-

ing her thick, auburn hair that reached down to her waist; while Adam, neatly though indifferently dressed, stood waiting, his hands behind his back. His clothes fitted badly and he wore them anyhow, as if they had been made of cardboard. In the fishing-boat — barefoot and bare to the waist — he was another man. Now he stood stiffly as he waited.

"What am I to do?" Uliana asked.

"What do you mean?"

"Yes... when you are not here I wait for you. The fishermen's wives are busy in the house and in the fields; or they work in their vineyard. I have nothing to do, only wait, and when you come, we don't even talk."

Adam was troubled. He looked out of the window over the empty courtyard. There was dust on the acacia-trees in the street. It had been a hot day.

"And what do you want to do?"

Uliana continued plaiting her hair — her auburn hair with its golden threads shining like the shell of a chestnut when you rub it between your palms. She was thinking with lowered eyes.

"I should like to be a school teacher, to have children to deal with. I haven't had children of my own," she added drily as if there had been no wish, no personal sorrow in it. Adam nodded:

"All right," he said. "Then you must put your name down for secondary school in the autumn."

A long silence followed. Uliana rose and faced him, her hands clasped; she looked at him with those clear eyes of hers all flecked with gold. Adam became stiff and, had he not stood against the wall, would have drawn back.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Adam... what have you got against me?" she asked.

Her lips were trembling, her eyes full of light. The afternoon sun streamed in through the window. Adam grew sullen and looked away.

"I've got nothing against you..." he said.

"Why did you come for me?" Uliana asked suddenly.

Adam drew aside as he said:

"What do you want? Let me be. Leave me alone."

However Uliana took a step sideways that she might face him again.

"What's going on in your heart? What do you have against me?" she reiterated.

Adam's countenance suddenly changed. His eyes grew troubled as he leaned towards her:

"Why do you ask? Don't you know? Don't you know there's something that can't be mended? Why do you stir things up?"

Uliana grew pale and murmured:

"So it's the old thing again?"

Adam did not answer. He simply set his jaws more firmly.

"I'd have done better to have killed myself... I wanted to once but didn't dare; I kept telling myself you'd come for me..."

Adam shrugged his shoulders in bitterness and said:

"Well, I came..."

What he meant was: 'I came, but it hasn't worked... it's no good...'

"It would have been better if I'd committed suicide," Uliana murmured.

Adam retorted vehemently: "It would have been better if you'd been patient for a year or two more,

until my return. It would have been better if you'd never married and gone to live with Simion Danilov!"

Adam too had grown pale; he clenched his fists tight and his grey eyes had a troubled, ugly look. Uliana sat down on the bed:

"What can I do? Don't torture me, Adam, what can I do? I was wrong to do what I did. I was weak..."

"Why didn't you endure things? Why didn't you wait for me?" Adam shouted. "Didn't I endure enough? When I was nearly drowned, I held my breath for God knows how long — I thought I would burst until I came to the top; but I endured it, keeping my mouth from swallowing the water that would have drowned me. That's why men drown, because they can't endure things — why didn't you endure them?"

"It was not a matter of enduring, for I didn't want to get married," Uliana sighed. "But besides torturing me, Adam, they all kept telling me that you were dead. What was I to do?"

"Just get between the sheets with Simion," Adam spat out insultingly in disgust.

Uliana grew still paler, but looked him in the face as she said:

"You're wronging me, Adam. You're not just... You don't know what my life with Simion was like... Only ask him what joy he had of me," she added with a cruel, bitter smile.

"I believe you," Adam said. "I believe you... but it's no good... I can't get it out of my mind... I can't get over it." Silence fell in the whitewashed, ill-furnished room.

"Maybe you'd like us to part," Uliana murmured.

"No," Adam mumbled between his teeth. "I wouldn't like that. And even if I wanted to, I couldn't let you go. But it's no good. This is no life."

"But what have I done, Adam?" Uliana asked again.

"Why didn't you endure things? Why didn't you wait for me?"

"I was wrong to act as I did... but don't go on torturing me now... Don't punish me like this..."

"I'm the one to suffer most," Adam murmured. "You don't know how it hurts... you don't know what I'm always thinking of, what is ever before my eyes..."

And he gave a sudden groan, grinding his teeth as he stood there with closed eyes. Uliana took him by the shoulders and shook him, calling out in fright:

"Adam ! Adam !"

She had never heard anybody grind his teeth before. The words "to grind one's teeth" had been just words to her. Now she grew afraid of his suffering.

Adam breathed hard. When he spoke, it was in dull tones:

"I'm mad," he said. "There's nothing to be done about me; you're not to blame either, poor thing; what were you to do..."

There was a grey quality about his voice — a deadness which made Uliana wring her hands.

"Don't speak like that ! Please don't speak like that ! Much better reproach me than that !"

Adam shrugged his shoulders: he was tired, exhausted. They continued to speak but they had nothing to tell one another. At the theatre they talked a little about the play, but on their way home they were both silent. In their bed at night they lay stiff and cold like dead people, each on his side of the bed. Neither slept. And it was only after a long time that Uliana put her

arm over Adam's breast, kissed him, her hot breath fanning his face, and seized by a deadly sorrow whispered:

"Adam, Adam! I've got nobody in the world but you."

Adam drew her towards him and gently folded her in his arms.

"It's the same with me... I've got nobody but you," he murmured. "Ever since I became aware of things I've had nobody but you and it will be like that till I die."

"Well then?..." Uliana whispered.

Adam caressed her gently; he stroked her hair, her cheeks, but did not say anything. That night their embraces were sweeter than ever, full of gentleness and peace, though full of sadness too.

Then Adam went out to sea again. On his return Uliana was waiting for him outside the Maritime Station. She took his arm and they walked home together along streets skirting the sea. Her face was pale and drawn, and her eyes often sought his as if trying to fathom the state of his humour.

"What's the matter with you?" Adam asked in surprise.

"Nothing, why do you ask?"

Then late at night, when they had put out the light, and Uliana had got into bed after Adam, she spoke:

"Adam!"

"Well?" Adam answered.

"Since you're still sick about what I did... you wouldn't want to have children with me, would you?"

Adam did not answer. He lay beside her in the dark, scarcely breathing.

"What was that you said?" he asked after a time.

Uliana spoke in a strange voice:

"If I was... expecting a child... would you b glad?"

"That wouldn't be our luck," Adam whisperec bitterly.

"But it is," Uliana said, laughing in the dark lik a sly little girl.

"What's that?" Adam shouted, rising so suddenl on his elbow that the whole bed shook.

"It is our luck," Uliana repeated laughing ner vously, though louder this time. And then Adam too her in his arms and began to kiss her, pressing her t him so tightly that he nearly took her breath away Uliana whispered brokenly:

"Maybe you'll get over it now and forgive me..."

XLVII

One morning the captain let Adam look at the sun through his sextant. He had put the instrument in his hand and shown him how to manage the screws. Through the lenses Adam Jora could see a strange world in darkness — the darkness of a yellow-hued eclipse, with the sea glistening and trembling as far as the horizon like a field of silver-like tilled land in dull, old silver. The noonday sun seemed to have descended to the horizon, yellow as sulphur — a livid, strange yellow star viewed from another planet. It rose above the horizon, stopped suddenly, then began to descend. Adam Jora returned the sextant, thanked the captain and went about his business.

He walked about the upper deck among loud speech and noisy laughter. The excitement was due to a foreign cutter, some hundred yards from the *October Star*. Cutters

of their own fishing fleet were also there — neat, grey vessels tossing on the azure wave, on the waters strewn with onion skins and fishes' entrails among which sea-gulls with folded wings floated leisurely.

The new cutter was of a different type and seemed to have borne the brunt of wind and rain, and there was a timber platform at her prow. On the platform were two rifles, a box of cartridges glistening in the sun and a pair of binoculars. A dead dolphin on deck with its bloody head visible from under a straw mat made it all clear. At the poop was the name of the cutter: *Veselina.* It had come from Stalin port, in the Bulgarian People's Republic. Naked to the waist and sunburnt, the dolphin hunters shouted to Emelian, Iermolai and Cosma:

"How goes it, Comrades? Any fish about? And when are you coming over to our country?"

They joked broadly, threw packets of cigarettes to one another and Iermolai, at the end of a string sent over a bottle on which was written "Industrial Brandy." The Bulgarian fishermen took it and uncorked it, smelt it and looked surprised; and one of them took a mouthful, but immediately spat it out in disgust, emptying the rest of the bottle into the sea, and swearing at Iermolai who was roaring with laughter. Luca Gheorghe though, as a peace-maker, gave the Bulgarians a bottle of real brandy and was thanked for it.

"No need for thanks," Luca Gheorghe shouted. "You did more for us." Then, turning towards Adam Jora, he explained:

"Last spring the storm drove us to Bulgaria. We couldn't reach *Mother* — it came so quickly upon us. But these people greeted us like brothers, gave us shel-

ter and food, drink and cigarettes... Good luck to you, Brothers, good luck to you!"

He waved his hand to the cutter, which, its engine roaring, sailed away quickly, with a tall, audaciously rising prow and a nearly naked man planted squarely on his feet on the fore platform, examining the expanse of sea through his glasses, ready at any moment to take his rifle should a dolphin's back appear.

"Good luck! Good luck!" the fishermen shouted. And the dolphin hunters waved their hands and caps towards the *October Star* as they sent their parting words over the distance:

"Come and see us again!..."

Adam Jora also waved to them like a friend; then glancing around and up at the mast, he saw that Cosma, who was in charge of the youth brigade, had climbed the mast and was waving his cap at the departing boat. Watching him come down with great agility and ease, Adam Jora thought: 'What a splendid chap! What clear eyes he has, how full of peace he seems... I guess his heart's not burdened like mine, it doesn't worry and fret... happy chap that he is!'

Still watching him he saw him go up to one of the factory girls and touch her on the shoulder lightly as he asked serenely:

"Well, Margarita, how are you?'

The girl swung round suddenly and looked at Cosma with a strange, reproachful sadness. And Adam Jora wondered what could have caused her look of grief. Then the girl hung her head and when she raised it again Cosma was moving away with the swinging gait of a strong man.

✦

That night Adam was on his way to the fishing-grounds of Emelian Romanov's brigade. The night sky, the green brilliance of the Evening Star, the mysterious reflection of the Milky Way in the water, the ceaseless roll of the cutter on the tiny waves of the quiet sea, the swash of the white foam resulting from the meeting of two currents in the depths below, the carefree talk of the fishermen — were all joy and delight to him. 'There's still work to be done,' he was telling himself. He answered Emelian's questions, joked and laughed with him, but his thoughts were anchored in his happiness — the happiness he knew with Uliana. He had never thought that what was happening to him now could actually happen; he hadn't even known that anything like what he felt now existed on earth. He would have liked to speak about his thoughts to the fishermen of Emelian's brigade; but of course that was impossible. He just smiled and was silent as he listened to their loud talk, their pulling each other's leg, their roars and laughter. The cutter stopped by the boats, cast anchor in the fishing-grounds, and the men went on board. As Emelian Romanov took Adam by the shoulders, a gruff shout was heard from the darkness:

"Emelian, Emelian Romanov!"

"Hi, what d'ye want with him?" Emelian roared out.

"Won't you give us a welcome?"

"Come along and see!" Emelian answered.

Two fishing-boats came towards them with the rowers clearing the waters vigorously.

"What's the hurry, lads? Are you hungry?"

"It's not hunger that brings us here; we've come for love of ye," Iermolai panted, climbing into the cutter with an effort, followed by a man so bearded that only

his eyes, ears and nose were visible. To this latter Iermolai said boisterously: "Now Tihon, man, ye just bring along that little fish, for we don't want these gen'lemen to say we've come to 'em empty-handed!"

Tihon dived into the depths of the boat and, emerging with a sturgeon the size of a ten-year-old child, held it in his arms gingerly.

"Hand it over!" Emelian roared, "hand it over, and we'll put it into the pot too! But, Iermolai, what about the lamp chimneys?"

"Not one. Not a single one!" Iermolai answered dolefully.

Another boat appeared from out of the darkness and a strong youthful voice said quietly:

"If ye invite us to yer meal too, we'll sing to ye..."

"Cosma! Shakes! if that isn't young Cosma," Emelian shouted.

The bearded man, who had cut up his sturgeon and was now cleaning a second one, said:

"Aye, it's him alright... Come along, me lad! Come along all of ye!"

The fishing-boat slid alongside the cutter and Cosma jumped on board. Andrei, the tow-haired youngster, who had formerly been in Iermolai's boat, and another fisherman made the boats fast to the cutter, after which they also climbed on to the upper deck. Emelian put his hands round Cosma's neck, hugged him and kissed his cheeks:

"Well, me lad, and how are things going?"

"Why, all right, of course..." Cosma answered quietly. "Evening, Uncle Adam, evening, Brothers..."

"See," Emelian said, "this here Adam, our comrade, is me guest tonight and tomorrow."

"As if he was only yours ! He's come to see us all," Iermolai objected.

"...but one thing makes me sore," Emelian continued. "I've nought to give him to drink and there's that Iermolai who says he'll stand him a treat and ain't got even one lamp chimney..."

"Honest to God I haven't," Iermolai returned plaintively.

Emelian asked in a thundering voice:

"D'ye swear to it? May you never eat shark's liver if ye're lying again. Lads, jump into his boat and look under his seat. Maybe you'll find something there like a babe in swaddling clothes... and that'll be a lamp chimney, Brothers !"

Iermolai, in confusion, objected to this onslaught:

"Hi ! A moment ! That's not the way to do things. Let me look for it... P'raps, after all, I may have something there... but ye, who talk so big... ain't ye the fellow who always keeps a fresh sturgeon for himself under the planks of his boat, and sends to the factory his earlier catch, like the old smuggler he is !" And they began to abuse each other, the accusations coming thick and fast.

But ere long Tihon shouted: "Ready ! Yer grub's ready !" which prompted Iermolai to jump into the boat and return with a bottle in his hand, just in time to take a seat around the napkin on which Cosma and Andrei had put chunks of bread, the big cauldron full of fish soup, a huge frying pan with sliced sturgeon in it and a cup of vinegar.

"Ha, ha !" Emelian bellowed. "And now, help yerselves, please, and don't be shy. And a good appetite to ye all ! We'll eat, until..." He sought for a phrase descriptive of a feast such as one might read about

in fairy-tales — "...until the moon is up!" he ended when light finally flashed upon him.

They helped themselves, some of them dipping their spoons into the cauldron of soup, others taking the fish from the frying pan with their fingers. They burnt their fingers and blew upon them, salted the pieces of sturgeon and threw them into their mouth, and when they found they simply melted on their tongues, had to replace them by others. A time came when Iermolai held out his bottle:

"And now let those who have burnt their mouth cool it!"

They took their turn at drinking, then Cosma filled another pan with fish and they began all over again; then they drank again and ate again of the sturgeon; and, finally, in the same pot in which the sturgeon had been boiled, Emelian dropped a packet of chicory and a handful of sugar. Pouring the coffee into cups and holding out a cup to Jora, he remarked: "It's an unsual kind of coffee prepared from sturgeon tail; but it's hot, so please to drink o' it."

"And take some jam, too," Cosma said.

Adam drank and ate without a word. The men began to puff and slow down their eating. A silver crescent appeared over the sea; the moon was up. Tihon rose to his feet and, facing it, made the sign of the cross. Then he murmured:

"Thanks to ye, Emelian."

"Come off it with yer thanks and have some more, do; ye'll vex me if ye don't."

"Thanks to ye again, me lad, but I've had enough."

"Really, Uncle Emelian," Andrei added, "we've got no room for more."

Cosma began to sing softly. And although he sang softly, his voice was so like a clear soprano that every word could be heard to perfection:

That's how I was
And that's how I'll always be...

It was a pure, though impassioned cry from far away, from very far away and from long ago — of times long past:

That's how I was
And that's how I'll always be...

He stood, his back against the mast, and sang his sentimental, aimless song, full of solitary passion. They all knew the words. Andrei's voice, boyish and warm, was heard first, then Iermolai's, thick and deep-toned, then the voices of the others striking up the song, rising and falling like the quiet waves of the sea. Adam was thinking... 'I was and still am... And yet I'm different... A new man...' Then he, too, joined in the song. Emelian put his hand on his shoulder:

"D'ye still remember it? Ye haven't forgotten it then?"

"I haven't forgotten anything," Adam murmured and went on singing.

Cosma and Emelian were leaning against the plank which did duty as rails on the cutter. Emelian asked Cosma in a whisper:

"And how is it with ye, me lad?"

"Me?" Cosma said. "Oh, I'm fine now! Not troubling about anything any more!"

XLVIII

Adam Jora spent the night wrapped in a blanket on the upper deck. The silence was such that no people on land could imagine. The lapping of the waves, a breath of wind that soon ceased — the sea might have breathed in its sleep — no other sound. A silence reaching out into the distance to the horizon that fused with the darkness, and going even beyond it. There was a dampness in the air, a light mist rose, and streams of water swept over the deck of the cutter. The coolness penetrated into Adam and his bones ached. Besides which the cutter dealt fairly roughly with him, throwing him pitilessly from one side to the other. And yet it seemed to him he was asleep and dreaming: he was floating through the air, then walking through gardens with Uliana. And when he awoke he didn't rightly know if he was awake or still dreaming. It was not yet daybreak. The sea was clear and smooth, of a greyish, almost white hue, like the cloudless, transparent sky; the whole world was a pearl and the cutter — the grain of sand, hardly visible, in the middle of it. The silence was still more absolute than it had been in the night. Adam rose on one elbow and looked at the black fishing-boats, their curved prows pointing upwards as they tossed on the waves. The men were still asleep. He lay on his back, his eyes fastened on the pearly sky. 'Things are all right,' he thought. 'There's still a lot of work to do; a lot. Still, things are all right.'

In the east the sky grew red as blood, then took on the colour of pink roses. The sun came out over the crimson sea. A tousled head appeared over the side of a fishing-boat, and someone gave a prolonged shout:

"C-osmaa... C-osmaa..."

Later there came an answering call, then other voices were heard. Day was breaking.

Adam Jora waited for Emelian to come and when he came induced him to let him take the oars.

"I haven't forgotten to row either, Emelian," he said.

"That's natural. Though how can I let ye work today, when ye're my guest?"

"But I'm asking you as a favour."

"All right! Afanasie, ship a pair of oars. We've got a fine day coming and we'll get more fish in a day than in a couple of weeks. More to the left, the line's dragging me into the water... more to the left..."

The current was driving them to the right. "More to the left...More to the left..." And this for many long hours. The blue sea sparkled in the sun. The air was warm and a breath of wind was wafted to them now and again.

In the meantime Adam patiently plied Emelian with questions about the things which the Party had to know: "Why were the mechanics on the cutter dissatisfied? What was a reasonable payment for them?" Emelian would answer him judiciously, earnestly, keeping the fishing-line at a distance. The weather had become sultry and Adam felt his blood going to his head. Now and then he looked over the water: Simion Danilov was fishing a mile away. He had seen him in the morning when the men in charge of the brigade's boats had decided on their plan of work. He was dark-browed and silent and pretended not to see Adam. What was Adam doing here anyhow? What need was there of him now in the fishing fleet?

"More to the left..." Emelian murmured.

The air became damp and oppressive. And the shirt of Afanasie, the other man in the fishing-boat, a reser-

ved and silent young fellow, was soon sticking to his back.

"More to the left..."

By noon they had loaded the cutter with several hundred kilos of fish to be dispatched to the ship. Emelian shouted to the man at the wheel:

"Look for us a few miles away, farther east. Seems there's going to be a wind, and it'll be fair for the sails."

"I hope you won't be overlooked," the helmsman said.

"Ain't ye got a logbook, compass and clock...Ye'll find us some eighty degrees from here... at an hour's sail."

And indeed, a few unconvicing gusts of wind did blow up, enough though to carry along the black boats of Romanov's brigade with their triangular, yellowish sails hardly swollen by the wind. They passed by the fishing-grounds of Iermolai and of the youth brigade and prolonged roars floated over the waves. The fishermen were holding an urgent counsel while Adam, standing at the helm, in the light, hot wind, looked at the cloudless sky and transparent waves. Cupping his hands about his mouth, Emelian advised the others to follow them to the deeper waters where the big sturgeon swim in the depths. And very soon several triangular sails were making for the east in the middle of the circle of deserted waters.

The first to haul down his sail was Emelian Romanov.

"This is where we stop," he said with determination.

His brigade came to a halt; Emelian lighted a fire in a rusty old stove and Adam Jora drew a small sturgeon from beneath the planks and cut it open.

"You old smuggler," he said solemnly, as he stood, knife in hand.

Emelian who was blowing into the fire looked at him sideways, raised an eyebrow and winked slyly, then went on blowing up the live coals. A greyish-yellow sail appeared, grew, came very near and dropped.

"Emelian !"

Emelian raised his head. It was Iermolai calling him.

"What are ye doing?"

"Well, at the moment preparing some grub."

"We're hungry too..."

"Join in then, the more the merrier... Hi ! Cosma boy !..."

The boats of the youth brigade had followed the others, splashing clear foam around them.

"What d'ye want?"

"Will they know where to find ye, Cosma, me lad?"

"We've left Costea drawing in the line; the cutter'll be back soon."

"Then stay and have a bite with yer Uncle here !"

After a moment's reflexion, Cosma said something to the youngsters in the other boats, indistinct to those farther away. His voice was heard but not his words. Then the boats went on their way becoming smaller as the distance grew, while Cosma's boat dropped sail and came towards the boats of Emelian and Iermolai's brigade which were rocking restlessly on the waves, knocking into each other and drawing apart to the lengths of the ropes which bound them.

Simion Danilov did not join the others' meal; he ate in his boat with his men. Adam felt his presence, silent, frowning, unmovable, with the same old hatred within him. But talking to the young men of the youth brigade — Cosma, Andrei and another youngster — he forgot him.

"Cosma, me lad, I keep regretting having let you go... How did ye have the heart to leave this boat?" Emelian reproached him. "Tell me, man. Is it 'cos they've put you at the head of a brigade ye've forgotten us old seamen?...Woe to us! Ye pups of the sea... have no more heart than the shark which had its liver chewed by Iermolai... Come, help yerselves — sturgeon, take more. A bit fat, aye, so it is, but with salt and vinegar, fit for an emperor. Cross yerself, Tihon, and thank God for yer feed!"

"I do thank Him, don't worry," Tihon answered quietly from the thickness of his beard.

They sat in Emelian's boat — as many as it could hold: Emelian, Adam, Iermolai, Cosma, Andrei, Tihon, the bearded one — and ate slowly, thoughtfully. Before them stretched another day of hard work. Emelian, who was the provider of the meal, did the talking to keep the others entertained:

"Hey, Adam, what's up with ye? What's wrong, Comrade Jora? Silent as the deep, ye are; and look thoughtful too. But in our boat there must be only light hearts, ye know..."

"Oh, I'm all right," Adam Jora said and smiled. "I can say I haven't felt so grand in years... maybe never."

Emelian nodded sympathetically as he said:

"Well, that's only natural. You've returned to the sea..."

Adam smiled again. He knew that it was not the only reason.

"Yes," he said, "I've returned to the sea..."

"When ye're an open sea fisherman, well, the sea's right here, in yer heart," Iermolai said raising his forefinger all shiny with sturgeon grease and then, striking

his bare chest with the flat of his hand, leaving five streaks of fat on it.

Laughing, Adam Jora imitated him, striking his chest with his palm:

"That's where I hold it."

"Damn and blast the sea," a youthful voice said furiously. They all turned in surprise towards the speaker. It was the youngster Andrei who had been in Iermolai's boat and now belonged to Cosma's brigade.

Iermolai said angrily:

"When the devil'll this kid give over swearing? Has he learnt nothing but that from his mum?..."

Cosma laughed:

"He'll give it over, Uncle Iermolai, when ye quit drinking..."

Adam gave Andrei a long look. When had he heard such reproofs? A long, long time ago... and then it was to him they had been directed — to him, Adam, who'd been a wild youngster, and just as foul-mouthed...

He spoke gently to the boy:

"It's just as bad using bad language as not to be able to give up the drink. If you want to be a man, learn to control your speech and say only what ye need to say, and not the first thing that comes into that block of yours."

It seemed to him he was talking to himself, the restive, untamed seaman's cub of long ago. This one, though, would not have to go through what he had gone. How lucky those were who were beginning life now! But aren't you also beginning life now, Adam Jora? You are, you know; for you, too, life has only just begun...

"And why did you swear at the sea?" he asked.

The youngster had kept silent since Adam had reproved him. He now shrugged his shoulders and his face took on a lowering look:

"It's so damned... and this rowing half kills us..."

"That's true enough," Emelian said interrupting his friendly argument with Iermolai. They all fell silent and looked about them.

"Look!" Iermolai murmured, "look over there..."

The talk had also subsided in the other boats. Two boats of Emelian's brigade, three of Iermolai's and one of Cosma's — all black, rocked gently on the suddenly softened waves. Some of the fishermen had got to their feet and scanned the sea.

The wind had dropped. The sea was rolling now only deep within itself. There was a restless lapping of tiny waves, like the bubbling of boiling water. And the sea had grown grey — the colour of lead. Overhead hung a whitish mist. But the blue sky could still be seen through the cloud of vapour, though it was gradually becoming paler. The light was going; yet it was not cloudy either — just a grey, sad twilight. But the real twilight brought the cool of the evening, not that heat which had suddenly come over the sea. It was stifling and the men kept mopping their clammy foreheads.

Emelian Romanov murmured:

"Where the devil was it brewed? What a deceitful devil of a sea..."

He started tidying up his boat, emptying the porringers and putting things to rights. Cosma rose to his feet and gazed far out at the whitish, simmering sea. Iermolai turned to them and said:

"No good searching for her... She's twenty miles away at least."

Cosma sat down again and shrugged his shoulders:

"What can we do?" he said. "Nothing but wait for it. Shall we fish?"

Somewhere, God knew from where, came a faint roll of thunder. Nobody answered Cosma. The men in the other boats worked on the helms and planks at the bottom of the boats, making them fast with ropes, and putting the fishing-lines and the rest of the tackle safely away. They worked zealously and in silence. The sea no longer rippled but became smooth, moving only in wide, oily undulations. Near to the boat it looked a livid purple with green stains as if of copper rust.

"Cosma," Adam Jora said, "d'ye think the lads who've gone ahead'll be able to manage?"

He had spoken in the effort to get rid of an oppressive memory. He seemed to be speaking in a dream — in one of those dreams in which he again saw a similar greyish white daylight, on the same ruthless and perfidious sea. It was a sea exactly like the one of long ago, though everything was different of course: himself, the men, everything; only this white sky and the shimmering sea looking like metal with its poisonous green patches, were the same...The same sky, the same sea, the same hot, heavy, oppressive, sultry atmosphere as that of long ago.

Cosma looked at the two short, slender lines lost in the distance: the boats of his brigade which had stayed on at the fishing-grounds, and he murmured:

"Yes... they're good seamen... but it depends on what'll come..."

"We'll see what'll come all right," Emelian Romanov said. Then, turning to Iermolai: "Get into yer own boat... Go home, ye old sea-dog, for you're cluttering up the place here."

After which he seated himself, rested his chin on his hand and murmured:

"The devil of a sea. To change like this in less than an hour!"

The roll of thunder again came to them from somewhere in another corner of the horizon. And slowly, very slowly, shadows engulfed that corner.

"The sea seems to be smokin'!" the youngster Andrei remarked.

"Maybe it'll pass us by," Adam Jora said in a very quiet voice.

"Maybe. . ." Emelian echoed him, and then gave a mirthless laugh: "Maybe it will. . ."

Adam too laughed mirthlessly as he said:

"Since you've had the *October Star* you're no longer used to storms at sea. . ."

"Ye're right there," Emelian said, "for some years now, we've got out of the habit of struggling with the elements. . ."

"Get a move on, Iermolai! And you, youngsters, get going too! Row for all ye're worth!"

Wiping his face with the back of his hand and looking at the sky, Iermolai rose to unfasten his boat. The clouds were very low and white — a kind of warm mist pressing upon the sea.

"Oh, *Mother*. . ." Iermolai mumbled and then: "Ye're holding your peace now, Andrei lad. Forgotten all that fine language, those damns and blasts, haven't ye?"

A louder clap of thunder came rolling from beyond the horizon. The youngster answered sullenly and in embarrassment:

"Well, I shan't swear any more. . ."

Iermolai laid his heavy hand on the boy's head and said:

"That's good, me boy... Remember I'll ask you some other time if ye've kept yer word."

The youngster's surprised and enquiring look said clearly:

'If you think there'll still be some other time for us, then that's all right, Uncle Iermolai... I needn't be frightened.'

Adam Jora had seen the look and knew that Iermolai had spoken thus only to allay the youngster's fears.

'The white and heavy sky, the leaden sea; and the heat and the thunder... the remote thunder...' Adam was thinking, finding it difficult to breathe, more and more difficult...

Of all of them he was the calmest. Only he knew that he was endeavouring to shake off a dream — the fright of long ago. He would not tell anyone, he would be too ashamed. He would never tell anyone.

The air seemed to vibrate, causing them all to look around attentively. No, nothing had changed. Just a breath, that was all. The thunder rolled, deep-toned. The clouds overhead were no longer white; they were dark now and the sea had grown a black-tinged purple, an uncanny, awe-inspiring colour.

Cosma jumped into his boat and Iermolai into his. Showing his courage, the youngster Andrei said aloud:

"This blasted sea! An hour's enough for it to go into tantrums! What a devil of a sea it is!"

"Hey! What about your promise?" Adam said.

The youngster grinned slyly as he retorted:

"Well, I'm givin' it up from now on. It's just this once I have to give it a piece of me mind — the bloody, perverse thing..."

Adam shook his head and said:

"That's all right, the sea'll make a man of you even if you won't try to be one yourself. . ."

"To hell with it," Andrei answered defiantly, leaning well back as he pulled at the oars with an easy, yet vigorous movement.

Adam Jora no longer listened to him. He was waiting quietly. He saw Emelian stand on his seat and look into the distance, saw him climb down, and heard him murmur — all as if in a dream:

"If *Mother* goes with the wind, she'll be here in three hours. If she goes against it, then only at night. Maybe the wind'll take us to meet her; that is, if the sea's not too rough; otherwise we're safer riding at anchor. . . D'ye hear, Adam?"

Adam Jora was communing with himself. He must drive that fear from his heart. He thought he had forgotten about it. Had not known it was still there. But though he had been only a lad and had struggled and survived, a deep scar had been left in his heart.

"D'ye hear, Adam?" Emelian asked again.

"Hear what?"

"What I just told ye."

And he repeated what he thought should be done. Adam listened looking intently at him, then said:

"If it comes from the north it'll take us away from *Mother*, I think. . ."

"Yes," Emelian said. "It won't help us much then..."

He looked around and then at Adam Jora, after which he shrugged his shoulders.

"It's coming from there . . ." Adam said. "No matter. . . We must just sit tight and wait. It can't last a thousand years." Emelian did not answer him.

'He's been in storms before,' Adam Jora thought. And, indeed, Emelian knew that a storm does last a

thousand years. It lasts an eternity. There's an eternity of fear in every moment when you choke under the fierce, seething waters. Yes, a storm lasts a thousand years and after that there is nothing left but stiff bodies on the beaches all covered with sand and washed by the waves. One of those bodies may be yours, Adam Jora — Adam Jora who once got safely away, Adam Jora who thought that his happiness would begin on the morrow, Adam Jora, former instructor of the regional Party committee — Adam Jora all covered with sand, floating face downwards in the shallow water near the shore.

Adam set his jaws and looked at the sea which seemed so quiet.

It was swaying gently its soft, glossy waves, as if smiling in its sleep. Beyond the skyline the thunder gave a grave rumble.

XLIX

There was much movement in the other boats. The men pushed the boats away from one another, and with their cables bound the loose timber to the anchors that, when they threw them overboard, they might give them stability. Cosma drew near; Simion Danilov had anchored some 400 yards away.

"Before ye're aware of it, it starts frowning," Emelian said. "What shall we do? Anchor?"

"We'd better. . . "

And seeing the timber in their boat was made fast with the anchor rope, Emelian threw the anchor into the livid waters. A shiver ran through Adam. He laid his hand on Emelian's shoulders and said:

"Let's stretch the canvas over us..."

As they did so the thunder started from one side of the horizon and spread through the clouds over half the circle of waters. For a moment all was quiet, then it started again, drawing nearer and receding, going up and down, never ceasing.

It was then that they caught sight of the bird: small and dark with narrow black wings, it sped over the waters without a cry, without a sound. It floated very low, like a cross flying over the surface of the sea. Emelian looked at it for long, made as if to say something but only sighed. Then he turned towards Adam and asked:

"Did you see it?"

Adam nodded and smiled a strange smile at a thought that only he could be thinking. They were quiet for a long time, busy putting the boat to rights. Later, with an effort to shake off the numbness which had seized him, Adam Jora asked:

"So you married Iachint's daughter?"

"Aye," Emelian said gloomily, "and we've got brats too... But you know all that!"

"She was pretty — Iachint's daughter!"

"Oh, she's no longer young," Emelian said in the same gloomy voice.

"I've heard she lands into you when you go home tight..."

"Oh, she does that 'cos I let her... and serves me right... But what business is that of yours?"

"And the kids... the boys, d'ye want to make fishermen of 'em?" Adam asked.

Emelian frowned and asked pugnaciously:

"And why shouldn't I?"

"I don't know... I was only asking..."

He couldn't help smiling. Emelian both laughed and frowned darkly:

"Seems to me the devil of the old days is still in ye. And that once I knocked ye about fine..."

"That was a long time ago, Emelian!" Adam laughed.

Afanasie, the other fisherman in Emelian's boat, looked at them in surprise, and wondered at their merriment. But the rumble of thunder that came ever nearer soon made him think of other things. Sheets of dazzling light flashed between thick layers of cloud. Suddenly the world seemed to cleave right across and a vision like a tree on fire flashed between the clouds and the sea, right in the midst of the boats. The thunder deafened them. The next moment, however, the sea was smooth, motionless; the clouds seemed still darker and more oppressive; the air held a strong smell — a smell of woods and mountain heights. But there was nothing but the loneliness of the sea and a strange light, a sunless, livid light. The skyline seemed to be a silver thread. And then, flashes of lightning wove between the sea and the sky to the northward. The men in the boats remained silent and unmoving, their eyes fastened on that point of the horizon. When lit by the lightning, their faces showed white — a bluish, unnatural white. Suddenly Cosma raised his hand and pointed towards the horizon: a rampart of shadow had come up over the skyline and was advancing over the sea at lightning speed. Cosma stared at the two small black dots in the distance: the boats of the youth brigade. The rampart of shadow was above them. Suddenly they seemed fainter, and a moment after had disappeared altogether. The smooth expanse of the sea was becoming ever narrower. White lines of foam could be seen approach-

ing at a swift rate. The roar of the thunder grew, spreading everywhere. Violet sheets of flame lit up the sea once, twice, thrice. The mountain of cloud suddenly expanded, rising over the boats. The fishermen bent their heads and crouched under the canvases spread over the boats. That moment the wind struck the boats with a brutal, jerky impact. The sky seemed to collapse over them breaking into ice and water, and the sea, which seemed to have been waiting for that moment, tossed impetuously, as if released from her chain and finally free to run wild and foam all over her dark expanse.

✦

Ever since noontime Luca Gheorghe had observed a cloud of smoke over the skyline. It had trailed for some minutes on the edge of the sky, then had separated from its basis and had wandered freely higher up the sky. Then another cloud had separated itself from the rest, and then another.

"There's bad weather ahead, boys!" he had said and began getting ready to return.

"Pavelică!" he roared out over the waves. "We're going back to *Mother*. Didn't you see the signal?"

The storm had caught up with them. The cutter pitched and rolled over the low, foaming waves, and the men in the hold laughed when the roll threw them against one another. Luca Gheorghe standing by the pilot on deck saw, as they approached the ship, more and more cutters on the ugly sea. One moment they were in sight, the next they had disappeared in the sheets of driving rain and the strips of disintegrating clouds amidst the moaning of the wind.

But one of the cutters fearfully tossed by the waves was not advancing.

"It's Emelian's!" Luca Gheorghe exclaimed.

The helmsman of the distressed cutter was holding on to the mast and signalling to them to take him in tow. As the cutters neared each other, Luca Gheorghe cupped his hands and shouted:

"Where's Adam? Where's Comrade Jora?"

"Over there!" the helmsman shouted back, showing the direction and calculating how many hours' sail would take them to him.

Luca Gheorghe made no comment, but Pavelică, the pilot, tossed and drenched by the foaming waves, said:

"Listen, I'll take you to *Mother* and then go after him."

Luca Gheorghe nodded mutely.

The *October Star* rose ponderously, then fell deep between the waves. The deck was full of boats, the sheers worked full steam, hauling up the newly arrived boats, while the cutters dispersed so as not to collide in the dark. Pavelică and his mechanic were soon on their way to seek Adam and the brigades of Emelian and Cosma. Captain Haralamb on the bridge was casting anxious looks about him. Luca Gheorghe asked him:

"Can't the ship make towards him?"

"How can she? More brigades have to come in," the captain said. And indeed the cutters with their boats in their wake — like so may corks on that surging sea — were approaching from every corner of the horizon.

"I'd rather be on the cutter that's gone after him than here," the captain said with his glasses to his eyes, watching Pavelică's cutter disappear in the early grey twilight.

All night long Pavelică looked for Adam without finding him. Instead he found a brigade which had strayed from its cutter, took on board the men who refused to take in tow more than one of their three boats — and went back to the ship.

L

They looked over the side of the boat with glassy eyes, haggard with giddiness. Before them the skyline went up, while they themselves dived into a bottomless pit. The foaming wave dashed towards them, the boat rose over the crest, the whole world slid down — a glimpse of a black horizon, of clouds scuttling over the water, torn and shredded by the wind's claws — and then the boat took its downward course again and the head of Afanasie, who was trying to lie down, came in sharp contact with the frame of the boat. Adam Jora was all crouched up, his knees to his mouth, holding on with both hands to a plank of the boat-frame, and waiting. Waiting is everything. The storm blows over some time. Either the *Star* reaches you, or the anchor rope breaks. Waiting is everything. Your head is in a whirl with the pitch and roll of the boat. But if this were all... If only it were nothing but that! But there are so many other things! The boat sways, then shoots up — quickly,unexpectedly, shoots up. And then there is that maddening jerk when the anchor rope becomes taut — that ceaseless jerk — if it would only come at regular intervals! But no, sometimes the tugs are rare, while at other times they follow each other in quick succession as if an obstinate hand was trying to wrench away the rope ring and all from its fastening place at

the prow, or as if it wanted to tug the boat's frame asunder, to disjoint its timber completely... Wait... Wait... The storm must blow over.

But all this time the fury of the sea grows. The waves are now at their highest. You can never see all the boats at once. When you are perched on the crest of foam, three or four of them are lost in the deep cauldrons between the waves. Then you yourself plunge down and the others lose sight of you. The boats of the youth brigade seem still to be about — far away in the distance. Nothing on the horizon. The *Star* is somewhere, battling against the storm which howls and cracks the sail stretched over the boat's poop, and plucks at the foaming waves causing spray to leap high over the heads of the fishermen huddled up in the boat. The wind is sharp and cold, one's overalls have long since been drenched, one's rubber boots have filled with water, and all the while the water in the boat that has been swept in by the waves breaking against its tarred timber must be baled out. But what of it? Only wait: the storm'll blow over and the *Star* must be near...

That's what they thought in the evening. When night fell and the waves rose still higher, and the wind's howl and the sea's boom were beyond what they had thought man's ear could record, Adam Jora crawled along the boat to shout into Emelian's ear:

"We'll sleep in turns! I'll keep watch while you sleep!"

Emelian nodded. They could see only each other's eyes shining in the dark. Adam crawled back and raised his head over the gunwale. The cold, foam-laden wind rushed into his eyes, filled his mouth. There was nothing to be seen but the rough sea and black clouds that trailed low over the water. As in the days of long ago. But it was

no longer a dream. It was stark reality. He felt too cold, too giddy to be dreaming. Too shaken by the boat that hurled him this way and that — too tortured for that. And the circumstances were different. Emelian and Afanasie lay at his feet, pressed against each other to mitigate the rolling that sent them from one side to the other, now with head downwards, now almost standing erect. He himself, however, kept watch, holding on to the boat frame and feeling no need for sleep.

Emelian and Afanasie rolled heavily at his feet. Were they asleep? He guessed what was the matter with them: they were possessed by giddy helplessness and lay in a state between sleep and watchfulness... They could not rest, but neither could they keep awake. And he now felt his own head dropping on his chest, his lids growing heavy; and then the boat tugged at the anchor rope and shook his brains anew and awoke him. Suddenly he felt someone clasping his legs. Emelian had crawled up to him in the dark and was telling him something which in the storm's uproar he could not well make out.

"What is it?" Adam shouted, for he had only understood: ". . .My guest... you sleep..."

He gave a short laugh and a light kick to Emelian as he said:

"You sleep a bit or I'll give you one with this tiller to put you to sleep."

Emelian dragged himself back to his place, while Adam remained at his place in the stern, thrown painfully this way and that and with his ribs all bruised by his bumping against the frame of the boat. 'Emelian must have gone off the rails,' he thought, 'having his head bumped against the boat so much...' and laughed. Actually he felt like kissing Emelian or giving him a

priceless gift. But he had nothing to give, of course, so he could only watch over him while he slept. . .

He realized that he was dropping off to sleep only when he felt something was being thrown over him. He shook off his sleep. Around him was the darkness and the phosphorescent whirl of foaming, rolling crests, furling up with a deafening noise. A tall shadow rose before him. Dazed with sleep, his eyes weak, he turned away:

"What is it? What do you want?" It was Afanasie. Did he want to tie him to the rope? "Put this on, put it on, I say!" Afanasie shouted.

What was he to put on? He groped with his hands and felt the cork of the lifebelt hard as wood. He had not taken his lifebelt from the ship, though. The fishermen had one each.

"I won't!" he roared, drawing away. "Whose is it?"

"Take it," Afanasie shouted, forcing it on him with his big, strong hands. A wave struck the side of the boat with a splash of cold foam and Adam became wide awake now.

He took the lifebelt from Afanasie's hand. The latter crouched at the bottom of the boat, holding his head between his hands. Adam Jora balanced the lifebelt in one hand and then threw it at him, catching him on the back of his neck. Afanasie left it where it had been thrown, not moving an inch. Adam pushed him with the tiller and howled at him:

"Put it on... and bale out the water!"

Then he seated himself again in his old place. His whole body, every bone ached. He again felt his thoughts dissolving into a sickly numbness. 'The brain can't stand this everlasting shaking,' he thought.

Fearful shouts, shouts such as he had never heard before, woke him with a start, freezing the blood within him and causing his heart to stand still. A sheet of foam struck him on the face and simultaneously he again heard cries of despair. It was still dark but a diffuse light prevailed over the narrow space between the clouds and the sea. All around on the waves, topped by thick crests of foam, the other boats appeared and disappeared. Some four hundred yards away Simion Danilov's boat was perched aslant on a threatening wave. A man was cleaving the air with an oar; another had dipped an oar into the water on the other side. Adam stood for a moment looking in that direction. Suddenly he pulled himself up and kicked the two men who lay at the bottom of the boat.

"Get hold of the oars! Simion's rope has broken!"

Afanasie looked at him open-mouthed, dazed by sleep and fatigue. Emelian also stood staring at Adam for a moment, who roared: "Get to the prow!"

Emelian dragged himself to the prow and began pulling in the rope. Adam pushed Afanasie aside. The young man jumped up with unexpected rapidity and, yellow, tousled and wet as he was, shipped the oars and began rowing manfully.

"Ease up a bit! The wind'll take us!" Adam shouted to him over his shoulder.

Simion's boat was riding across the wave. The next moment Adam knew what had happened by Emelian's face. He clenched his teeth and checked an impulse to look over his shoulder a second time. There was nothing to be seen anyhow. Steering the boat with an oar, he knew that in a moment the anchor would no longer keep the prow of the boat on the wave. Now

was the moment! The boat sped freely like an arrow with Adam striving to keep the prow on the wave and speaking to it bitterly: "D'you want to carry us away? D'you want that wave to capsize us too? D'you want to drown us?" While Emelian, the muddy anchor in his hand and the fierce wind driving the boat over the waters at lightning speed, could only save himself from falling into the sea by a mighty effort.

"Pull! pull now!" Adam roared.

And Afanasie rowed with all his might. Emelian now shipped a second pair of oars and began pulling too. A few yards away floated the overturned boat showing its black, shiny ribs again and again being submerged by the foam. Black rounded objects could be seen on the water: the heads of the men who had been in the boat.

"Harder or the wind'll take us!" Adam shouted hoarsely.

His face was yellow, his eyes burning, his unshaven cheeks haggard, his cotton coat a wet rag. And the faces of the other two were equally startling.

With a superhuman effort, they kept their boat near the overturned one and thrust out their oars to the men in the water. Amidst the seething foam the heads of two men bobbed up and down like black balls. They were mad with fright at no help arriving. Adam roared:

"Here! Here!"

He plunged his hand over the gunwale to help the nearest: it was Simion Danilov, his eyes white with horror. Simion took the proffered hand and heaved himself over the gunwale. Still grasping the hand, he looked into Adam's face. Suddenly he recognized him. His face grew distorted and he let go of the hand and

threw himself back into the water. Accidentally Emelian's oar caught him on the head. Simion clung to the oar, then to the boat with both his hands — those big hands with their thick fingers. Emelian slowing the boat to make it easier for him, he climbed in with difficulty, panting, livid, dripping with water. Adam shouted:

"Take care you don't upset us all, and give a hand to the other one!"

The other one was Iermolai who had been very nearly drowned in the furled crests of the waves which had continually submerged him despite his lifebelt. Emelian caught him by the hair and got his head out of the whirling foam. They hauled him into the boat where he fell on his buttocks, looking at them in surprise, after which he began to laugh. Adam and his mates then shouted again and again to receive some answering call from the third man. But no answer came and nothing was to be seen of him. So the third had been drowned. Simion who had hardly got into the boat looked with awkward hostility at Adam and withdrew to the other end of the boat, his eyes full of savage fear and hatred. Adam took no heed of him. He shouted:

"Emelian! The anchor!"

Emelian cast the anchor overboard while Adam rowed on for a space until a brutal jerk of the boat threw Emelian into it. Adam had waited for this breathlessly: Would the rope give way? No! A second pull and a third showed that the rope was holding. It was only now that Adam looked in the direction whence the wind had blown them; the other boats had been left far behind and could scarcely be seen, and the wind that had brought them so quickly here continued to whistle ever more shrilly, ever more drearily over the

rough expanse of the sea, in the strange light of morning, under the threatening clouds. The waves were so high now that every time it seemed a miracle never to be repeated that the crest of the wave should merely skirt the side of the boat. Every time they rose on a wave he wondered whether their moment had come. But with frowning brow and set teeth he just stared unmoving. Perched at the poop, his hands clasped on the helm, he looked at Emelian and the others as they sat there drenched through, their faces distorted with fatigue and strain, and shouted to them:

"If the rope breaks take to the oars! And go easy! They must find us!"

They had sought his eyes, waiting for his orders.

"And rest a bit!" he shouted again.

Emelian who was crouching between two seats seemed already half asleep. Iermolai rolled into a ball — a big, thick ball — had fallen fast asleep. Afanasie baled out the water, while Simion sitting at the end of the boat had gathered himself together as if ready to take a jump, run, pounce upon someone. His eyes were fastened on Adam.

There were five of them now — a weight too heavy for the boat which was pulling hard at the anchor rope. An hour went by. Two hours. And then the overloaded boat gave a last pull and glided smoothly, lightly, between two waves running aslant.

Adam Jora steered as if up against his deadliest foe. Emelian and Afanasie needed no encouragement from him. Iermolai had been awakened from his sleep and in a moment had understood the situation. The three of them sprang upon the oars and pulled for their very lives, their faces distorted with the effort. When they had brought the boat's prow upon the wave, the

other boats were infinitesimal dots that disappeared in the distance.

Simion had not moved from his place at the end of the boat, farthest from Adam at the other end.

LI

Some time before, Simion Danilov had come home from sea with the news that Pricop had been taken to prison by the frontier guards. On the same day he learned that Uliana had lodged a petition at Court for divorce.

At the beginning the old woman, mother of Simion and Pricop, had cursed and wailed at the top of her voice; had torn her kerchief from her head and gone about with her tangled, yellow-white hair loose on her shoulders. The old man and Simion did not comment upon it. Simion went and got drunk, and only shook off his drunkenness to go to sea again. Later the old man had only asked for details. Who'd been at the bottom of it? Where did it all come from? Adam Jora. Yes, Adam Jora.

After that he said no more. The old woman too had quieted down, having become fearful at seeing him so much changed. At first she had not realized what was the matter with him, had shouted at him and shaken him.

"You miserable thing! You sinner! Do something! Get your son out of jail!"

He had pushed her roughly aside without answering. Pushed her aside as if she had been just a piece of wood. He had gone to the far end of the courtyard to sit on the log there alone. Then, without saying

anything, he had made a journey to town to find a lawyer. He was still more sullen on his return. He had gone to church and had prayers said for the salvation of Pricopie, God's servant. And after that he had sat quietly, never uttering a word.

And now there had been a storm for two days.

Fearful gusts of wind whistled and rumbled over the dry hills parched with drought, and over the dusty, yellowish land. The storm had pulled down chimneys, had torn away pieces of roofing from the houses. The willows had let down dishevelled tresses to flow in the wind; and clouds of smoke sped over the land. There was light and there was fog — a livid, strange, dull light, and a dry, yellowish fog made up of particles of clay. The people who had to go out were forced to hold on to something in order not be carried away by the wind; most stayed at home, in shady corners, listening to the rattling roofs and windows and to the whirling noise of the sand being hurled against the window-panes. They looked out at the choppy, yellowish, foaming salt-water lake, at the troubled distances, at the sedge tossed about by the storm.

There was silence in the old people's room, the old woman giving only stifled moans while Eftei Danilov sat clasping his knees with his withered hands — hands which had once been square and heavy.

Suddenly he got up and began pacing the room with clenched fingers. He stopped in the middle of the room and looked up at the ceiling, and spoke to the ceiling in hatred:

"Am I to blame? Where have I sinned? Haven't I lived like any other man — done no more harm than others? I haven't stolen, murdered or run after women. But I've helped the church and given money for it.

Why do You punish me now? What do You want of me?"

He was breathing hard.

"You've taken everything from me! I've no fortune, no word in anything; my stock can't be continued. You've brought unhappiness to one of my sons and the other one You've had thrown in jail. What have You got against me? What have I done to You?"

He raised his fists and chokingly threatened the ceiling, bringing out only smothered moans. Then he burst out:

"You don't exist! There's nothing! Nothing! Or if You exist, punish the dog! Do justice! Drown him! Let him rot at the bottom of the sea, let the fish eat him; let there be no trace of him left or of his stock. Let even his name be wiped out. If You exist, if You exist. . ."

He was howling, his fists raised towards the ceiling. The old woman had shrunk away on her stool, with protruding eyes and her hand across her mouth. And Eftei Danilov went on howling, spluttering and threatening the ceiling.

"If You really exist, do justice! Make them pay for it! Wipe out even the trace of their faces, that nothing should be left of them, just as You want to wipe out every trace of mine, of my people and of everything I've had. O God, smash Adam Jora!"

He stood stiffly, with raised fist and beard pointing upwards, unable to utter another word. His arms fell to his sides and his beard sank on his chest. The old man went over to the window which the wind was rattling and looked resentfully at the yellow waters tossed by the storm.

LII

All this time a boat was being tossed on the yellow grey sea, under the dark speeding clouds with sheets of water flying in the air. Visibility was no more than two or three miles. Cosma and the other two young fellows in the boat had sighted a ship battling hard with the wind and waves, rising and sinking. They had signalled to her desperately but she had steamed away under her column of wind-driven smoke. And they had been left with nothing but the forbidding waves, flying foam, and clouds torn by the wind. And their faces? Cosma had grown a beard, his face was pale and his eyes burning as if with fever. Andrei's cheekbones stood out prominently and his eyes had sunk deep in their sockets. The third fisherman lay motionless in the boat. So only the two rowed, drenched through, their heads spinning, their arms becoming weaker. Young Andrei's wrists ached horribly and he had the feeling that his arms were coming out of their joints. The end could not be delayed for long. A deadly fatigue would take hold of them, the oars would drop from their hands, first from his hands and then from Cosma's, and then the waves would toss the boat as they liked, sideways up to the clouds, under the crest of a wave which would engulf it in its seething roll and overturn it. No, the end could not be long delayed. But was it possible they should perish? That the life within them should be extinguished? Cosma could not admit this, would not accept such an end. And yet it would surely come, come unfailingly, and for ever, without salvation, however much his heart might rebel against it.

Andrei's arms fell to his side. He realized dreamily that Cosma was rowing alone and was doing so more

and more slowly, putting less energy into every stroke, and leaving longer spaces between them. With every wave that carried the boat up, Andrei's head rolled on his shoulders. Voices, music, and strange, alien sounds rang in his ears; but this was only giddiness. All around the devilish wind howled over a deserted sea, while Andrei's drowsiness increased.

Catching him by the arm, Cosma pointed towards the skyline with his finger, but Andrei could not look; his head fell forward on his breast. Cosma shook him, compelling him to look, but the lad's gaze went only to Cosma's face and what he saw there — it had brightened, become almost unrecognizable through a kind of laughter or weeping, or some great joy — woke Andrei up. He straightened himself on his seat and looked into the distance: a column of smoke was rising on the horizon. A ship!

With numb hands he took hold of the oars and began to row. The prow of the boat must be kept on the waves for another hour or two. To row all that time was beyond him.

His arms were useless, his shoulders dead. A languor seized him as when in a dream you make a desperate effort to hold up your hand and cannot succeed. Their faces, his and Cosma's, had grown small, were pale, with their eyes sunk deep. It was far easier to sleep.

"Maybe she's not coming this way," Andrei said, speaking to himself, indifferent as to whether Cosma heard him or not. "And then it's no use..."

The oars fell from his hands and played freely in the water. Sleep was too strong for him. Cosma hesitated a moment, curled up and looked around as if at bay. Suddenly his eyes lighted up and a mighty shout burst

from him expressing prayer, cunning, will-power, desire, despair and passion all in one.

"We're saved ! We'll live ! Look at her ! It's *Mother!* She's coming to us !"

He shook him and beseeched him, his feverish eyes seeking his at such close range that their faces almost touched.

Andrei seemed to be shaking with fever. He held out his hands as if in sleep, groped for the oars, and, his head falling backwards, began to pull, his eyes fixed on the ugly, oppressive clouds torn by the wind. Cosma no longer looked at him, but gave all his attention and strength to the oars, until the muscles of his neck swelled and his face grew ugly with the effort. It was evening. A shrill wind blew. Cold salt water flew over the prow of the boat and splashed them.

LIII

With one anchor wrenched away by the waves and her deck all splashed with foam, the *October Star* advanced slowly against the wind, rising and falling with the ascent and descent of the waves, rocking and gliding into the empty spaces between them. The billows struck her prow and dashed foaming on to the deck, where to walk would have meant instantly being washed away by the waters. Tied by their cables and covered with canvases, the fishing-boats dripped with salt water; the foam sometimes leapt as high as the signal-room windows where the officers were searching the horizon through their glasses.

Some time about noon they had sighted a black spot; within two hours they had reached it. It was the

boat of one Foma Chirsanov. The men in it had jumped into the water and swum towards the mother-boat, risking to be swept away by the waves, or being smashed against her. Foma had bound a rope around the boat and, when he saw that the hook of the crane had been caught in the rope, they had all jumped into the sea. As they went up Jacob's ladder, a wave would wash over them and, as it withdrew, show the fishermen again, drenched through and always ascending. When they reached the deck, Foma asked for some rum, and then he told them that Cosma's boat had been carried with the wind in the morning, and he pointed in which direction. The officers looked at one another: Cosma might have passed by them at a few miles' distance.

"We must look for them," the captain said. "Do you hear, Nicolau? And for Jora also."

Towards the evening they had sighted another boat. When they drew near they recognized the youthful voices of the young men of Cosma's boat. The men were looking wild with fatigue and strain. When they had reached the upper deck all flooded with sea water, they had sunk down, wet, pale and exhausted. One of them had asked for a cigarette while Andrei had sat in a pool of water from his clothes, his elbows on his knees and his forehead on his arms, and had gone to sleep there and then. As to Cosma, he had suddenly found Margarita, who had thrust aside the sailors crowded upon deck to see them arrive and help them climb into the ship, flinging herself upon him and hanging about his neck in tears. And he had gently caressed her hair.

"Forgive me, forgive me," she had said, her face against his shirt all dripping with sea water, and he had murmured softly:

"Don't worry, it's nothing, nothing," while continuing to stroke her head.

Then he had gently unloosed her arms from about his neck and gone up to the bridge, where Captain Haralamb had asked him curtly:

"Where are we likely to find Jora? Can you tell us that?"

"The wind took him that way last night!" Cosma had said pointing southwards where the clouds showed as dark as the rest of the sky and where strips of fog chased over the huge, purple green waves, of a strange and horrifying transparency.

"Prodan, set the helm at 210!" had been the captain's order.

And shaking in every timber, with the waves striking against her, the *October Star* had changed her direction, and slowly sailed south — south-west in quest of Adam Jora and his mates whom they were not to find.

LIV

Late in the night, they sighted a small light flickering on the sea. They saw it when it was fairly near, appearing suddenly between the waves, from behind the great sheets of foam swept over the waters by the sea. It gave short leaps to right and left, whirled, rocked, jerked about, burned quietly and then leapt again... Adam rose to his feet, his legs all stiff, stuck his knees against the frame of the boat and began shouting long and loud. He felt the wind sweeping his voice away, forcing it back into his mouth. The others too had awoken and roared in unison with him. Adam bent over to shout in Emelian's ear:

"A fire !"

Emelian was thumping his head with his fists:

"Hurricane lamps, hurricane lamps ! They'll overlook us, they'll overlook us !"

"The bucket !" Adam roared. Quick as lightning Emelian bent, groped in the dark among the jumble of fishing tackle and human bodies, all drenched through, until he found the bucket, filled it with dry chips of wood, coal and woodshavings from the box at the poop and tried to strike a match. They were wet, or the dry ones found at last were blown out by the wind. Iermolai tried striking his flint against the bucket, while the others kept up their shouts till they lost their voices. The little light was receding. They howled desperately, when suddenly a tall tongue of flame that the wind drove horizontally leapt from the bucket which Iermolai held aloft in his short, thick arms. In a few moments the little light grew stronger, and they could distinguish a cutter leaping among the waves, disappearing in the foam, then appearing again with prow pointing upward and the light at her mast making crazy spirals in the air. The cutter was trailing an empty fishing-boat. Some hundred yards away, she slowed down and a black vision appeared issuing from the pilot's room whose windows were seen faintly in a bluish haze. It was a man who clung with both hands to the cutter's bit of mast, under peril of being washed into the sea at any moment. An inarticulate shout came towards them.

"He says we should make towards them," Emelian roared. But Adam had not waited for this summons. He had already seized an oar and was steering with it, while Emelian, Iermolai and Afanasie rowed.

They drew near to the cutter which seemed so much bigger and heavier than usual — though only in compa-

rison with their own frail nutshell of a boat, their narrow, light fishing-craft — and went round her to come to the lee-side. It was then that they first heard the throb of the engine. They awaited the approach of the cutter which was now being driven by the wind, with their oars ready in their hands, to avoid an impact. When the cutter was quite near, the gap between her and the fishing-boat was so great that any attempt to board her meant either falling into the sea or a leg or hip crushed between the cutter and the fishing-boat. Two or three times Iermolai made the attempt but always, as the cutter glided upwards, the men in the boat were compelled to lend all their strength to prevent her running them down. Emelian again began to pull at the oars shouting meanwhile to the man at the wheel:

"A cable ! to tow us !"

The man understood and crawled towards the poop holding on to a cable. Several times the water leapt over the side of the boat and passed over him in a white stream of foam after which he would reappear dripping with water and crawling on. The first time he threw the cable it was taken by the wind and fell wide of its mark. But finally Adam caught it and passed it on to Emelian who bound it fast to the prow of the boat where Simion was. Up till now the latter had remained inactive, now he suddenly rose and jumped into the sea, and taking hold of the towing cable slid along it. So he allowed himself to glide through the water. Then, when the cutter leant, her side dipping into the water to the starboard, Simion rolled upon the deck, clinging with his hands to the wire rigging. Adam glanced at Emelian: there was no point in their remaining in the boat in peril of their lives. He shouted:

"Jump, all of you !"

The man on board the cutter had pushed Simion somewhere into safety and was waiting for them. Iermolai sprang into the sea and swam towards the cutter. Afanasie, with an oar in his hand, was keeping at a distance the second boat — the empty one which had been in tow of the cutter and which had drawn too near to theirs — looking now and again at Adam and Emelian as if for instructions. It was plain he was scared. His face looked white in the darkness broken only by the phosphorescent streaks of foam.

"Jump !" Adam yelled.

Emelian shook his head.

"Emelian !"

Emelian shouted back:

"I'm staying in the boat ! It'll take us to *Mother* all right."

Adam climbed over to him to push him overboard. But Emelian only laughed and propped the end of his oar against his breast.

"The boat is in my charge !"

The man on board the cutter was still shouting. Very likely he could stop no longer. Adam signed to Afanasie, but the latter shook his head, raising his chin towards Emelian. The latter laughed saying:

"Jump yourself ! The cutter's waiting."

'I can't leave them,' Adam thought. 'Besides, we'll get to *Mother* this way too. It won't matter. I'll stay with them.' He was in high spirits, happy to feel himself safe, and understood why Emelian was laughing. He cupped his hands about his mouth and tried in the whirling wind to make the helmsman understand that the boats of the youth brigade had remained somewhere to the north-east. The man nodded and in a moment the cutter was sailing away pulling at the cables, her

engine throbbing; Adam and Afanasie sank down to the bottom of the boat and, with Emelian at the helm, the boat slipped over the waves, splashing sheets of foam to great heights, while Afanasie set about making fast the sail of rough, wet canvas over the stern, Adam seeking to make himself more comfortable. A sharp movement of the boat brought his head in contact with the seat and, rubbing it, he began to soliloquize:

'Damn it, if I got drowned now, another instructor'ud come and unless he was a fisherman by trade, it'ud take him half a year to get into his stride and learn everything.' He took a deep breath and, giddy with fatigue, his eyes began to close. Between his closing lids black columns lined the way and he wondered whether he wasn't travelling in a car of the regional committee, along a country road between the hills. No, he was not in a motor-car; he was in a boat, though certainly among hills. It was pitch dark; his thoughts grew confused and he fell asleep. Then, at one moment, he didn't know exactly when, he found Uliana sitting by him in the car. She was very sad and asked him:

"Why are you leaving me? Now that we're going to have a child?"

"But I'm not leaving you! Are you crazy? We'll never part again, not in this life or the next, do you hear?" Adam was speaking in a troubled voice as he pressed her hands tight. And then he woke up, his heart beating quickly and a great pain and bitterness possessing him. But he had only been dreaming; the boat was tossing on the waves. The other boat, the empty one, could be seen ahead, and farther away, the black cutter rocking as if she would turn on her side at any moment. 'But it would take a great deal to sink such a boat. They are so well built — have such a solid upper

deck, and are well closed in too,' Adam thought. And he became aware how light and frail and open to the waves was his own little craft. Afanasie was sleeping, curled up under the canvas tied over the boat. Emelian sat at the helm. Adam took him by the leg.

"Leave me alone and go to sleep !"

Emelian shook his head and, in a drowsy, almost inarticulate voice, said something about "only a little while now" and "*Mother*" — words which the wind swept away. Adam let his head drop on his chest again and slept a deep, heavy sleep, the sleep of death, totally unaware of everything that went on around him, until he suddenly heard a fearful oath which made him jump up and stare wide-eyed in the darkness around him. He saw nothing but the empty boat and the cutter — both quite a distance away though the cable had not seemed so long some time ago — and Emelian who was pointing towards the cutter and calling to it desperately, though it was impossible to make out what he was saying. Suddenly Adam understood and jumped to put in the oars, turn the boat round, and bring her prow upon the wave before it was overturned and they were all drowned. They had their life-belts, of course, but in a few hours the cork of the belts would be swollen and would drag them down. The cutter was sailing away under the wind; there was no way of making themselves heard. The cable had broken. Emelian cut the canvas with his knife and kicked Afanasie in the ribs. The lad awoke in a fright and rushed to the oars. Getting past him and almost falling overboard Emelian made his way to the prow, where instead of rowing he began dragging in the cable, his back turned towards them, and remaining motionless for a moment. Then, he turned round and held out the end of the cable to

Adam, passing it under Afanasie's seat. Adam bent over and took the cable. What did Emelian want to show him? He looked at it, but found nothing unusual about it. It was too dark. Emelian made the sign of cutting with his two forefingers and roared out:

"It's been cut!"

Adam then felt the cable: yes, it had not broken. It had been cut with a knife. He looked at the cutter: she could hardly be seen in the distance and the darkness.

LV

Simion had fallen into the hold of the cutter. Iermolai followed suit, dropping with a thud and drawing the hatch over him. A cold sheet of water streamed over the side of the hold. Thick voices swore at the newcomers, but no one could be seen. It was hot, the air was dry and heavy, and there was the smell of fish, tar, sweat and wet clothes.

"Who are ye, brothers?" Iermolai asked merrily. "Who are ye, my doves, my dear ones, that I may know who to take to my heart?"

"That's Iermolai," a voice said.

And another swore quietly at Iermolai.

"Is that how a brother, a decent man, is welcomed here, you lubbers? Shame on ye!" Iermolai said in aggrieved tones.

The second voice again swore at him, at which Iermolai asked:

"Is that the only thing ye know, my little turtledove? And was it yer mother who taught it to yer? Though I admit it's good quality! Come, heave over and make room for me to lie down."

There was the sound of a falling body followed by a howl.

"Now, who was it that I trod on? And what are ye landing into me for, you fool?" Iermolai asked still in good humour.

"Light a candle someone!" a voice roared out.

Someone struck a match, then lighted a candle. A fisherman got as far as possible out of Iermolai's way, groaning and holding his belly. The others laughed:

"Iermolai's as heavy as any big cod."

"Oh, was it ye, Danilo?" Iermolai graciously asked the man who was holding his belly. "And what have ye got against me to strike me so?"

"Does your hand hurt, Danilo?" a fisherman asked.

There were some eight men there in the hold all sweating, tired and with bloodshot eyes, and a thick stubble on chin and cheeks. Simion had rolled himself up in a corner. Blankets, sacks, cases and a cask could be seen in the red, trembling light of the candle. When the cutter rolled and pitched into emptiness, the men fell over each other, some good-humouredly, others, the more tired, swearing sullenly. Simion saw who they were: two of them, Danilo, the one Iermolai had sat upon, and another, had been his friends in the village when he was young — well-to-do young men, owning fishing-boats and tackle. They now worked for a wage so as not to come up against the poor of the village, and to minimize the difference between them — though they had been so proud of it in the old days. Grimy, unshaven and frowning, with sunken cheeks and puckered brows, Simion was thinking. He had been doing that for the last few moments. There was fear in his

heart but also joy. Iermolai was relating what they had gone through:

"The sea water I've drunk, Brothers, has given me the most fearful thirst that ever was. The very heart in me is burning."

"Why the devil don't ye drink other water then?" another murmured.

"Yer stinking water? Why, it's so foul it's enough to make one ill," Iermolai said in disgust. "Haven't ye got anything cleaner?"

And he looked at them pleadingly with his small, shining eyes in his ruddy, full face which was just as shining.

"Chirsan, my good man, will ye let a brother's heart ache?" he asked sweetly.

The man he had spoken to — Simion's other friend — turned round and fumbled among some odds and ends. Iermolai brightened up with expectation and, when he saw him produce a bottle, he stretched out his hand happily:

"Let me see if it's the right thing," he said. "I'll tell ye how it is."

"Give it him after the others," one of the men advised from the far end of the hold, "or ye won't have a drop left !"

"I wonder I've so many enemies," Iermolai murmured sadly. "And that folk can be so cruel these days... Chirsan, ye do as I tell ye and — hand over the stuff. Ye must listen to yer elders if ye want to get on in the world... Don't start with it there !" Iermolai suddenly roared in a fright. "Pass it over here !"

On the other side of the wooden partition behind them the engine was throbbing, shaking the timber of

the cutter. The candle flickered, ready to go out at any moment. Sweating, blinking drowsily, the fishermen sat propped up against the walls, drinking from the bottle, spilling liquor over their beards and clothes whenever the cutter pitched and rolled more heavily. And soon the smell of brandy was added to the other smells, fouling the air still more. They found other bottles, and before long become fast fuddled and a rowdy crowd.

Simion who sat doubled up like all the others — the hold was low on account of the small draught of the cutter and one could only sit with bent shoulders under the upper deck — suddenly rose and threw open the hatch. A stream of cold air, spray and the terrible roar of the sea came into the narrow hold of the cutter.

"Close it!" the fishermen yelled.

Simion grinned at them and explained that he wanted to relieve nature.

"Then do it where ye are!" Iermolai roared. "Me heart's generous and I've no objection. That's the kind of man I am!"

But the others shouted at Iermolai telling him to be quiet and at Simion to hop it quickly and close the hatch. Simion climbed up on to the wet upper deck, closed the hatch and, holding on to the stay — the cutter could sail very well with one sail only — crawled towards the poop of the cutter. His hand was stuck to the rounded wooden stay; he knew that if he lost his hold he would go overboard. Beneath him the upper deck rose crazily. Piercing the darkness he tried to make out the two fishing-boats in tow. As his eyes got used to the darkness he was able to discern them. The empty boat belonging to the fishermen in the hold beneath rocked gently some dozen yards behind the cutter. (During

that drinking bout he had learned that they had left their other two boats riding at anchor. That brigade was one of the worst in the fleet, manned by drunken fishermen that worked to little purpose.) The other boat was more distant and Simion could see it only faintly. For a long time he lay on the wet boards making sure which was Emelian's. Adam Jora was there. He had hated him a whole lifetime. And now he had him at his mercy. 'You've taken my woman, but you won't enjoy her. You won't...her.' And he uttered the ugly, dirty word with immense and savage satisfaction. 'You won't get away now. You're done for, Adam Jora. You'll rot in the water, Adam Jora; the fish'll grow fat upon you, Adam Jora!'

And after making sure which cable belonged to Emelian's boat, he drew his knife from his boot and with his right hand began cutting it while with his left he held firmly to the end of the stay. Like a living thing — a thin white serpent — the cable suddenly sprang into the air, then fell into the water and disappeared. Lying there alone on deck, likely to be swept away at any moment, Simion began to laugh. He laughed loudly and with boundless delight. Then he crawled back, opened the hatch and fell into the hold amidst the drunken roars of the others.

"Simion, me boy, come and suck at this teat!"

It was Iermolai speaking in a sentimental voice, and he took him by the head and made him drink from the bottle, very nearly breaking his front teeth, what with the cutter's terrific heaving. Simion was not slow to drink from this or from other bottles, and soon was as drunk as the others. He had become very hilarious; was simply doubled up with laughter. Finally Iermolai realized that Simion was not laughing at the dirty

jokes and stories going around, but for no reason whatever.

"Simion, me man, hasn't your mind's sprung a leak," he said reprovingly, which stayed his hilarity a moment and made him think that Adam might yet get away safely and that it would then be easy to prove that the cable had been cut. But he could never get away in such weather, without the cutter and without a chance of being discovered by the *October Star.* So he again brightened up and again went off into his fits of laughter which caused Iermolai to kiss him and remark : "Ye, old dog, Simion, ye're not such a bad sort after all. A dog ye are and come of a family of dogs; dogs all of ye but you're an amusing chap for all that. Suck here me precious, at your mother's teat !"

And a second time he very nearly broke his teeth with the bottle although now he clenched them, thinking he would return to Uliana. He would find her and get hold of her and have her as he had her long ago when she was his. And he would hold her tight and roll her, and then strangle her.

"To Constantza, you lubbers !" he roared.

Iermolai welcomed the suggestion:

"And we'll drink enough to sink a ship. No need of the store-room on the *Mother* closed by that set of fools."

"Come on to Constantza and let's get drunk and make a night of it !" Simion called out and then he thought: 'I'll go and look for her and throttle her, twist her b... neck with these hands. But I must be careful, so that nobody should know about it.'

Some of the fishermen were against it. The brothels had been done away with, and where else were they to go?

"Don't worry," Simion shouted again, "trust me to know a place or two. Aren't there private people who've got rooms? D'ye need a signboard by any chance? Can't you manage without it?"

"Me, no ! Unless there's a signboard and the mayor's approval to it, I'm sitting tight," Iermolai returned boisterously.

The laughter and shouts that followed determined the others to go. Iermolai and Simion crawled towards the pilot on all fours and gave him the order — the smell of spirits emanating from them nearly knocking Pavelică, the pilot, backwards. He drew his black brows together and answered them:

"Ye must be mad ! D'ye think I don't know my duty. And who are ye anyway to order me about?"

Iermolai's reply was a pat on the shoulder in token of friendship, but such a heavy one that he nearly fractured his shoulder bone. Simion drew out his knife.

"Don't mind him," Iermolai said good-humouredly. "But listen to me, for I'm a good fellow — he's only a dog — but I'm kind — I'm the milk of human kindness !"

The pilot, whom Iermolai's kindness scared just as much as Simion's ferocity, continued to object, but when Iermolai pressed his arm and Simion pricked him with the sharp point of his knife through his coat even ever so slightly, he paled and let go the tiller.

"Do what ye want," he said, "I'll have nothing to do with it," and he went below to the cabin at the prow where he slept with the helmsman. Iermolai calmly took his place at the wheel and turned the prow west — north-west. The cutter shook violently, which seemed to please Iermolai: he had to find something to drink, now that they had drunk all the reserves in the storeroom.

Simion crawled back among the drunken fishermen, some singing maudlin songs, others snoring in their drunken sleep — the sleep of death, as it seemed. His thoughts went back to events and, as if satisfied with them, every now and then he laughed and shook his head. What luck! He had not even dreamt of it... He felt relieved and laughed with exhilaration.

The dawn was dark with a dirty-looking sky covered with yellowish clouds floating low over the sea. Above the skyline long rows of hills rose, and the towers and earth-coloured houses of Constantza. Pavelică, the pilot, came out of his cabin to plead again with Iermolai:

"Don't take her in, Uncle Iermolai!" he said pale with fright and sleeplessness and with his hair all ruffled. But Iermolai pushed him against the wall with his elbow. And it was then, when Pavelică gave another look at the choppy sea and the waves that almost swallowed the cutter, covering it with foam, so that not even the aerials of the radio-telegraphy post in the port, not even the tower of the big mosque could be seen from her, but only the overcast sky with its clouds trailing almost upon the surface of the waters, desintegrating and merging again, and mountains of ugly grey-green waters rose all around — it was then that Pavelică saw that Adam's fishing-boat was no longer in tow of the cutter, and he began to moan. He crawled back to the hatchway and down into the darkness again, pervaded by the stifling stench of brandy and the vomiting of the drunken men, and he began to shake the fishermen:

"Don't let him take us in, Comrades, we're done for, if he tries. We'll all be drowned! Let's seek shelter behind Tuzla!"

But the fishermen only swore hoarsely. They hardly understood what he was saying — didn't even listen to

him. They cursed him terribly with Christ's blood and every other blasphemous thing their troubled and fuddled brains could remember. Iermolai was steering right towards the open port. A cargo-boat was riding the waves far out of the roadsteads, waiting for the storm to blow over before putting into port. Iermolai, however, thought he could bring her in all right. From the open sea, the water near the shore — where the rocky sea bottom suddenly heaves itself, and where the waves rise against the incoming boats to perilous heights — did not seem so very terrible, although the darkish waves ran and leapt frantically towards the port, throwing up their foam to the lighthouse flare. Iermolai was already taking her into the entrance of the fishing port. What harm could come to a high sea fisherman such as he?

Pavelică was still speaking in the dark to the fishermen when there came a shock to the cutter that threw them against one another in a fearful commotion, after which she seemed suddenly to come to a standstill, and strange things began to happen. The whole world seemed to revolve round Pavelică, a quilt fell upon his head and water rose rapidly — to his ankles, to his knees, to his hips... The pandemonium in that complete darkness was frightful, but one thing they knew — the cutter was on its side. In a few moments it would sink, and the men in the hold would go down with it. The corner of a case struck Pavelică in the back. He was in water up to his waist and at every movement he came against the bodies of the men, and hands waving in the little air that was left and which sang in his ears under pressure of the rising water. Pavelică shouted shrilly:

"Try to get out through the hatch at the other end !"

He heard Simion Danilov's voice swearing at him for the last time. Then in that jumble of men, quilts,

boots, cases, bowls, sacks and mattresses which floated on the water bumping against each other and mixing with the shouts and curses of the fishermen, Pavelică dived, got out through the hatch, swam under the deck of the overturned cutter and came up to the surface at the last moment, just before he would have been drowned. He swam with difficulty and not straight towards the shore but to a place where the height and fury of the waves had somewhat abated. He reached the shore two hours later and lay unconscious upon it. It was only after several hours that the port authorities learned that a man had been found upon the coast and taken to hospital, raving about a cutter which had been lost trying to put into port; and it was only two days later, when the storm had somewhat subsided, that a picket-boat of the port authorities discovered the prow of the overturned cutter sticking out of the water near the shore, and they heard the sound of thumping and hammering. Returning to port, they brought back with them axes and sledge-hammers and chisels and made a hole in the perfectly dove-tailed boards of the cutter. And from within they drew out a fat, heavy fisherman white as a sheet and with glassy eyes. It was Iermolai who, when the cutter had capsized, had found himself driven by the rushing waters into the cabin at the prow. The weight of the Diesel engine in the stern had kept the prow out of water with Iermolai locked inside in the darkness, in the steadily lessening air. The seamen on the picket-boat looked in silence at Iermolai who sat with downcast eyes, his elbows on his knees, his hands hanging limply.

Suddenly Iermolai raised his childlike eyes and asked in a faint voice: "What about a cigarette?"

They put one between his lips and lighted it; and one of the men took a flask of rum from his pocket,

uncorked it and held it out to him. But when Iermolai raised his head to drink and the smell of spirits reached him, he became still paler and, pushing the flask aside with the back of his hand, said faintly:

"No, no spirits! Some water if there's any..."

With difficulty they raised the cutter out of the shallow water. It was not more than nine feet deep where the waves had carried her, smashing the poop and part of the engine against the rocky sea bottom. They found the helmsman drowned in the engine room, and in the hold nine bodies among which was Simion Danilov's.

LVI

Quite suddenly they had found themselves alone in the night. The wind had chased them over the sea through the dark — they did not know in what direction. In the morning Afanasie had collapsed with exhaustion and had lain at the bottom of the boat ever since. And now for the first time Adam Jora thought he really might die.

The sky was of a grey-black hue and looked as if made of iron, with heavy dark clouds hanging from it that moved as if by some huge machine of the world, whose creaking chains and wheels and gigantic rusty rollers were invisible, though they could be heard with their shrill, metallic clanking rumble. And the sea was also of iron: the waves struck against each other, like iron blades, with a mechanical fury as far as the eye could see, and the heavy drops that fell over the side of the boat struck against Adam's back like iron shot. This world of air and sea was entirely of metal; only man's body was of weak, sore, fatigued, exhausted

flesh. Was this the end? Adam pulled again at the oars that kept the boat across the waves. But surely it was for the last time: there was no more power in his arms. His muscles ached sorely, were benumbed, exhausted. Was it the end?

Not yet. He didn't know where his strength came from, couldn't understand how a man could have so much, but once again he forced the oars against the wind which, striking the surface of the sea, rejected them as if it had been a living hand. He slipped them into the water and pulled again. A trembling smile of amazement, fear and triumph flickered in his eyes and spread over his weak, drawn bony face and unshaven chin. He smiled unconsciously, for he was thinking in amazement of his discovery and was frightened by what he had discovered, though at the same time he felt he was soaring up to the heights of the iron sky with the knowledge he was beginning to gain: "If I've still got strength... who knows how much more I can draw upon? What am I? A man. And any man has as much power as I, if he desires it, if he seeks it — releases it from wherever it is chained. You find in yourself the reserve you need. You can do anything you want to do." Whether it was the fatigue, the exhaustion of his body which made him talk so, made him delirious and whether his thoughts were not merely the ravings of a brain that had been agitated hundreds of thousands of times by the waves of a churning sea, he couldn't have said. One thing was certain: that a feeling of triumph, a wild joy of the victor had taken possession of him. And why? Because that extravagant thought which may only have been the raving of a moment of fever and delirium had crossed his mind. And, forgetting his fatigue, he once again pulled mechanically at the oars, speaking

to himself: "Adam, you're mad. D'you think there are no limits to your powers? Yours are wild thoughts, Adam. Before long you'll drown, you'll rot in the water, find rest and forget about your unconquerable power..." A shiver passed through Adam at this thought and he answered himself: "Damn you, you devilish doubt that's hanging about my neck. Yes, I'll surely drown! But let me tell you one thing that you won't be able to answer. Any thought's good that yields good results. In other words, it's practical life that is the final test... You, doubt of the devil, breed nothing but disaster. My thought gives me new life. We'll see who's right!"

And beneath this thought another, more secret thought was hiding and laughing slyly: 'And even if I lose, I'll have fooled you, Doubt. For I shall have lost all awareness and I shan't care about you any more! I'll have fooled you, Doubt!' And nearly laughing — certainly he was raving with fatigue, sleeplessness and hunger — he once again slipped his oars into the grey-black water and again pulled at them.

Emelian, who had been sitting nearly doubled up, his knees up to his mouth and his chin resting on his chest, slipped to the bottom of the boat and crawled on his knees and elbows to Adam. Raising his ashy face and bewildered eyes, and trying to make himself heard, he roared:

"It's all over with us!"

Adam shook his head without saying a word. He could not speak: there was no strength in him for that. With desperate, scared conviction, Emelian roared out again sorrowfully:

"It's all over, I say!"

Adam once again shook his head.

Resting on an elbow, his head rolling loosely, Emelian groaned in agony as he again raised his eyes:

"The kids... I shan't see 'em any more..."

Still Adam did not speak. He went on pulling with superhuman effort, but God, it was difficult! The wind was pushing them back, the boat rising perilously, and so he sat, ill-balanced, with one oar in the air and the other dipped half its length into the water — and how could he pull with one arm only? Apart from which, fear had caught at his heart. "You found no place in me, Doubt. You found no place in me, so you took a round-about way to reach me. You got into Emelian and set his eyes rolling in his head and his tongue moving in his mouth, and you speak through him. I shan't see my child either, nor shall I see Uliana, after having yearned for her for ten years. And this just when I had begun enjoying her love — and now, I shall lose her for good. Oh, Uliana, my Uliana!"

He was shouting above the noise of the storm. But who was there to hear him? The iron machinery of the world rumbled away with its rusty rollers, grinding the fishing-boat and the men in it as if they had been corn ground at the mill.

Emelian began tying himself with a rope to the frame of the boat. He shook the man lying at the bottom and roused him from an almost unconscious state. Emelian looked older — exhausted, dead. His thick snub nose — a perky nose — his vigorous shoulders, his keen intelligent look — were all gone. He was tying himself to the frame of the boat, and doing it slowly as if in a dream. Afanasie had let himself drop again to the bottom of the boat where the water that had swept in was lapping.

"No!" Adam roared. "No!" He didn't know to whom he spoke. But there had gathered in him a fury, a sly, unshakable, invincible determination. "You'd grind me like corn, would you? Then I'll turn into wind, water and fire so that you'll not get me to grind under your wheels. I'll fight my way through somehow — come through yet, and win. You can't stop me! You can't squeeze the life out of me. You can't kill me! You can *not!* You can *not!* And you never shall!"

Had he shouted his thoughts aloud? Who could know? He himself didn't. There was no one to hear and remember. Emelian was trying to pray, after the age-old custom of the fisherman before drowning, but his face only twisted in pain. He turned to shout into Adam's ear:

"I can't pray..."

And Adam, his face distorted by emotion, his eyes bright with anger, shouted back:

"Untie that rope!"

The other looked at him stupidly. Adam stretched out his right leg towards him. From the boat the handle of his knife emerged.

"Cut that rope!"

Emelian looked frightened — frightened by Adam and his unnatural resolve. What was he to do? He had done his job — had tied himself and only had to wait for death. And now... To cut the rope? Start everything from the beginning?

Making things still more fearful, a gust of wind shook the sky and the sea and deafened them, overstepping the limit of man's sensibility. It was then that a rampart of cloud and fog collapsed, and Emelian, who had drawn the knife out of Adam's rubber boot and had cut the rope with which he had tied himself to the

frame of the boat, and had also untied the other fisherman, was looking into the distance and slowly pointed with the knife in that direction. Adam turned his head. But at that moment the boat glided from the height of a wave into the precipice between two foaming crests and nothing could be seen but water, crystal mountains, a valley the colour of iron, and clouds of darkness overhead. But Emelian's face had registered such horror that Adam awaited the rise of the next wave and thereupon, its crest surrounded by seething white foam, Adam turned and saw... Along the skyline a thin strip of grey-green light and beneath it a long high coast of rocky cliffs, and still lower, a white streak drawn by the big breakers — the deadly breakers along the shore. It was the end. The open sea is less dangerous than the wash. In the shallow water along the shore, the waves rise three times as high as in the open sea, their crests breaking in a whirling mass of water from which there is no escape. The luckiest and finest of swimmers can never reach such a shore, for here, too, the current is strong which draws the water back from the shore to the open sea. And the boat was gliding in that direction. The wind was pushing it towards the coast, the currents drawing it towards the coast, the waves leading it that way. And beneath the rocky cliffs, the huge waves were receding, rising, rolling up their mane and dashing furiously against the steep shore to recede again, and again to advance and strike. And the end? Would it be now, or later along the shore? And all at once Adam remembered another storm of long ago and a tumble-down house ("Old Acsinia! She is dead..."), and the nights of suffering on the prison plank-bed full of bugs; his yearning for Uliana more painful than the parched fever in his weak body from which the bugs sucked all its

sap. And then he remembered the man who in hardly audible whispers had taught him to read at night and had spoken to him about the revolution and the historic mission of the working class; he remembered, too, the towers of the Danilofca churches, that he had seen in the distance at the edge of the plain, and Uliana with her clear eyes and her soft and trembling mouth, Uliana who looked at him and asked him whether he wouldn't like to have a child — and he began to speak to himself as he rowed:

"Not now! Nor ever!"

"Never. Never!" he mumbled. "I haven't finished yet, there's still work for me to do. I've only just begun. Has mine been a life? Hardly out of hell and you want to strike me from the list of the living?" And he began to laugh with a terrible hatred.

"Will you take me now? Even now? Ha, ha! What a joke! Ha, ha! Ha, ha! Why didn't you ask me whether I wanted to go? Maybe I still have something to do!" And he laughed as madmen laugh.

Afanasie did not move. He lay in the boat, sleeping perhaps. Emelian looked at the cliff emerging from the sea and becoming ever higher, while Adam waited for the fishing-boat to top the wave, and then he turned his head and, like a man ready to take in earth, sea and sky at one glance, shouted to Emelian:

"Over there! Steer that way! Towards the sands!"

Emelian understood. He jumped to the tiller with the quick though heavy movements of a bear and he began to steer, as well as he could against the current. He had understood. A thin strip of sand could be seen to the right. That way at least the sea might break the bones of their body but would not crush their heads

against the rocks. That way they would drown — or swim to safety.

The expression on Emelian's face changed and he too began to row. It was becoming increasingly difficult: outgoing currents, foaming, swirling water forming funnels at the surface through an impulse from the depths. Now being sucked downwards into a chasm that suddenly opened under them, now with the water surging round the oars almost to the rowlocks, the two men waited like wolves at bay for the moment when they should jump clear of the boat, for any impact with it would be dangerous, maybe deadly for the swimmers. The thunderous roar of the waves striking against the shore, and the cruel wailing of the wild wind deafened them and made it impossible to speak. The cliffs had dark red veins running through them, making everything look like immense masses of clotted blood. Above them low, stunted bushes shook their branches in the wind, and overhead, in the cold thin air, high up where the air seethed like the sea, birds with round, motionless eyes and sharp iron beaks agape hovered above these men of flesh. Suddenly the air was filled with spray, the waves rose — a mass of white seething foam... Pulling his utmost at the oars, Adam still kept the boat on the crest of the wave. Now he might have jumped into the sea, leaving Emelian with the boat, but he was no longer a young man — he was cute and experienced and strong and knew better than to use up his strength which must be spared. The distance he would have to swim must be short. The boat must take him as far as possible, then he would use his arms. Around him the sea rose — a mountainous mass — one long high wave — so high it made your head swim to look into the chasm opening before it. The oars trembled like the strings of an instru-

ment in the seething foam. And his arms and shoulders too. And without cease his brains vibrated to the trembling of the oars. Don't give way, Adam, make straight for the sands ! About thirty yards to the left, huge boulders — blood-coloured — girdled with moss, sank and emerged again, streaming with foam, and the waves again roared and broke with a thunderous noise against them, and smoke flew up and formed a white poplar in the air. To the right, towards the sands, the billows, never still, withdrew and then rushed towards the rocky rampart above and, exhausted, withdrew to dash against them again, tumultuous and violent, without respite. High up, on the edge of the rocks, the wind-swept, twisted bushes trembled in the transparent emerald-green sky with its cold clarity. Make straight for the sands, Adam, though the tossing, the falling, the buffeting of the waves bruise you to the bone ! Don't let go of the oars ! Remember Uliana's clear eyes; her moist and trembling lips and the tiny creases around her eyelids ; her sparkling teeth when she laughs. Only she laughs but seldom. Sometimes she is sad even when you fold her in your arms. "Don't be sad, Uliana ! Don't be sad !" Adam coaxed and he laughed, though his face became twisted by passion. The boat was now rising upon the highest wave, and the red cliffs suddenly appeared above Adam as if ready to fall upon him. With eyes alight, he looked at Emelian saying: "Now !" To Afanasie he gave no thought ; he just couldn't be helped. Emelian looked at him in answer. He was alone with Adam, linked to him by the oldest and deepest friendship that men can have for one another — so that however many other people there may be, they are one in face of the deadliest danger. For a moment the boat swayed on the foaming crest, with a gaping chasm behind and a bottomless white precipice

in front, then poised in the air a tiny space that seemed to last an eternity, resting on nothing, and then on the edge of the wave, of a green, transparent crystal which folded up, and fell together with the boat and the men in it, bearing them into a white chaos of foam.

Adam did not know when the boat overturned, nor how it was that he had been hurled at a great distance. He felt a huge weight on top of him — a weight which, with a tremendous force, sent him down towards the dark green depths... Before going down he had inhaled deeply, and now he waited until that weight, which was greater than the world itself, had grown less; then, as its pressure eased, Adam, his chest ready to burst, swam towards the surface with vigorous movements of his arms, like a bird soaring up, and, deafened even beneath the water by the maddening roar of the waves, came to the air surrounded by innumerable big silvery bubbles and in the midst of the boiling foam, even as a green and sombre mass of water with a thin, transparent edge rose to overwhelming heights. He had scarcely inhaled a breath of air, breathing in with the noise of a death rattle, when a shadow came upon him and a new crest fell with its scores of tons of water, driving him again towards the depth. Swimming straight ahead on his side, he slowly let out the air which issued from his mouth and passed before his eyes in brilliant clusters of bubbles. And again, with the same wide and furious movements, he rose towards the surface of the water which he saw reflected by pale-green oval mirrors in the troubled green light of another world. Coming to the light of day again, another wave darkened his sight and, falling from on high through the sheets of water, hurled him towards the depth. No longer with any reserves of air to fall upon, and only by making use of all his will-

power, did he keep himself from opening his mouth while the fearful, greedy desire of air, the frightening beating of his heart, the dizziness of a wandering mind, urged him to give up the struggle, renounce everything, open his mouth and swallow — if not air, the sea water. And as he swam upwards once more towards the troubled light overhead, he felt that it was the last time, that he was finished, that he could no longer endure his torture. And a terrible heart-breaking pain seized him, and from this pain was born fury, an invincible opposition, his old and undying will-power, and with his last resources of strength he swam towards the moving silvery mirrors overhead and to the surface where he drank in the air with what was almost a howl, swallowing too much sea water that made him sick. But he realized that he was swimming between the last two waves. He was no longer a youth — was over thirty, and was cunning and strong. Looking behind him he saw the heaving billow sweeping in and without resistance, he allowed himself to be carried by it, raised in the air over the empty chasm and then, when the wave rolled up its crest, to sink and swim quickly, resting on the power of the water, being carried onward as if on a wall. He felt the whirling water pass over him — the water which overturned him with its contrary currents surging upwards or sucking everything in towards the depths. He went down still deeper, then came up suddenly on the back of a wave, streaked with foam, allowing his palms to rest on the power and swiftness which dragged him onward and upward... upward... Now again from behind came a terrible rumble and he found himself in the shadow of another crest, forcing him back into the depth, deeper, deeper than ever... Without air, without inhaling, he swam with frantic movements, always on

one side and towards the surface — exhausted, torn by so many claws, tortured by the need of air, the fearful temptation to give it all up. No ! No ! The surface — the surface ! And again his head emerged from the boiling sea which carried him with dizzying swiftness towards the shore buried in the whirling foam. The last wave raised him above a stretch of water full of cold rough sea-weed — a dirty sandy water — and dashed him on to the beach, then pulled him back with a strength far greater than any human strength. Gasping, his fingers and toes spread like claws, Adam felt himself pulled backwards, the succeeding wave that fell upon him alone sufficient to drown him, to put an end to him for all time. But Adam went down of his own accord and swam through the thick, dirty water with its sea-weed and sand and swirling currents, whirlpools and spirals of blind strength and rage. Twisting now to one side, now to the other, he slipped beneath the roaring waves, swimming towards a less forbidding part of the crest, and, carried to it for the last time, he felt sand and sea-shells under his nails. Gathering the last vestiges of strength, he stuck his nails clawlike into the sand, thus keeping himself from being carried back and, still immersed, pulled in every direction, battered by every conceivable force, he pushed forward until he could raise his head above the water, panting, groaning — but always pushing onward along the wet sand. His hands were bleeding, his breast had been cut by the jutting rocks and was streaming with blood. Once more he drew himself upwards and then fell with his face against the wet, rough sand. A little later he raised himself on his hands and knees, then, resting his elbows on his knees, forced himself up. Turning towards the threatening roar of the billows he looked over them, then, with failing steps, re-entered the water for he

had seen a black spot, a man's head which had immediately disappeared. The next furious wave brought in Emelian, transfixed by the fear of death. Before he could be washed back again, Adam had dived once more into the water, gripped him by the arm and was once again dragging himself onward, his nails fast in the sand, this time dragging Emelian after him. He dragged Emelian on to the beach. Out of the sea's reach, Emelian lay, his hair like a wolf's on his big, square head that hung limply, full of sand; his skin an earthy purple, his sunken eyes nearly lifeless, the lids closing over them. And Adam lay too, his breast on the sand, his cheek on it, feeling the earth shaking under the impact of the waves. He remained with closed eyes, breathing and filling his body with air until he felt light, very light, clear and transparent as if made of air itself. A sob stuck in his throat. Raising his head with difficulty, he turned it to look upon Emelian who had opened his eyes and was regarding him, his drawn, almost unrecognizable face lit up by a gentle smile. He thrust his hand into his cotton trousers — he was streaming with water from top to toe — then brought it out and looked into his palm. In it was a handful of wet paper and some dripping tobacco — one or two cigarettes had even retained their shape. Like a wounded animal Emelian dragged himself on his elbow to a spot of dry sand, straightened two wet, twisted cigarettes, laid them near each other to dry, and then fell back again upon the sand with closed eyes and seemed to sleep. Adam had got to his feet and was walking slowly, with shaking knees, towards the cliff, looking for a place to climb. Gripping the rough bushes growing among the rocks, he began a difficult ascent, but finally reached the edge of the cliff. Behind him the sea roared, dashing the boat to pieces against the rocks on the left

where Afanasie's body was rolling in the foam. The cold wind whistled around Adam drying his face and the salt, sand and sea-weed on his body. Clouds with big rifts showing a pale sky passed overhead. Barren hills, yellow earth with sparse grass stretched before him. Not a single tree. Not a single house. Columns of dust were chased by the wind; oblique sheets of light fell through the clouds, twisted walls of dark blue showed where it was raining. And everything was shrouded in clouds of dust. But there must be people somewhere about, and Adam went to look for them.

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